

# CORRECTED VERSION

## EDUCATION AND TRAINING COMMITTEE

### **Inquiry into geographical differences in the rate in which Victorian students participate in higher education**

Rosebud—12 May 2008

#### Members

Mr M. Dixon

Mr N. Elasmar

Mr P. Hall

Dr A. Harkness

Mr S. Herbert

Mr G. Howard

Mr N. Kotsiras

Chair: Mr G. Howard

Deputy Chair: Mr N. Kotsiras

#### Staff

Executive Officer: Ms K. Ellingford

Research Officers: Ms C. Whiteman and Ms J. Hope

Administrative Officer: Ms N. Tyler

#### Witnesses

Mr J. Cauchi, Director, Sustainable Communities, and

Mr D. Conley, Youth Services Coordinator, Mornington Peninsula Shire Council.

**The CHAIR**—As Chair of the Education and Training Committee, David and Joe, I welcome you to our hearing, and you will obviously welcome us to your shire in a moment. As you are aware, there are five members of parliament here at the moment, and we might be expecting the other two who are on our committee at some stage during the day. We are conducting a hearing into the geographic variations as they affect students going on to higher education and so we are interested in input from the shire and the people from this region in regard to that. I will declare the hearing open and look forward to your contribution in regard to both your welcome and to our inquiry.

There are a couple of formalities. I need to let you know that, when you are speaking to an inquiry, you are covered by parliamentary privilege, so you are free to say anything you like and you cannot be taken to court over it. It is good to be in the Mornington Peninsula this morning and to speak with you.

**Cr GIBB**—Thank you, Geoff. I am David Gibb. I am the Deputy Mayor of the Mornington Peninsula Shire, and welcome to the Mornington Peninsula and the interface councils. The interface councils were started in 1999, and they are the eight councils ringing Melbourne that are a minimum of 70 per cent rural, so some are even higher than 70 per cent. We had the problem that the interface councils were being perceived as metro, and paying metro charges but receiving rural services. This was an inequity that we struggled with for many years, where we were ineligible to apply for rural services.

These maps are most graphic. The red shows the built-up areas, zoned residential 1 in the interface shires, so that leaves all of the green areas as rural. What that means is that, just like any other rural area, we have a shortage of tertiary institutions, a shortage of public transport, and all the disadvantages that go with that. Kids might have an apprenticeship and they will be offered night work; they simply cannot get to the job or get back from the job. Similarly with tertiary education of any sort: we do have a TAFE college in Rosebud, but that is the extent of it, and it is, again, not served by public transport, so they have to go off the peninsula, out of this rural area, to get tertiary education. As well, we have terrible retention rates here in secondary schools, which you will hear more about today.

I will leave it there. Welcome. I hope you have a productive day. There are refreshments during the day; we will look after you! Good work. Full steam ahead. Thank you.

**The CHAIR**—Thanks, David.

**Mr CAUCHI**—Committee Members, there are three comments I want to make before I hand over to my colleague David Conley. Firstly, I want to leave you with two images.

**Slides shown.**

**Mr CAUCHI**—This is a nice path: leafy, very pleasant to walk, very relaxing. It is the sort of pathway from school to employment that many young kids follow. It is not the case for the majority of kids on the Mornington Peninsula. It is more like this: they reach almost a building site, with a lot of blocks. Keep those sorts of images in your mind.

The second point is to acknowledge that we as a municipality share many of the obstacles and challenges and difficulties that many young people throughout Victoria experience, so we do not have a monopoly on the issues. However, because of the unique characteristics of the interface, the challenges and difficulties that our young people experience are exacerbated.

Thirdly, we are going to do something revolutionary today. We are not going to focus a lot on the problems and the challenges and the issues. You will have read about a lot of those in your reports, and we assume that you have read the submission by the interface councils. Hopefully, we are going to point to where some of the solutions might lie in addressing the problems that our young people experience, and I would like to hand over to David in that regard.

**Mr CONLEY**—Thank you very much. We are making our submission supplementary to the interface councils' submission, and in our submission we are also acknowledging a submission you will receive later on today from the Frankston Mornington Peninsula LLEN. We would like to advise that we think

they are submissions that contain a lot of the details and the rationale behind why young people are not connecting terribly well into higher education.

When I started examining this issue, I had a very simplistic view, and that was: 'All we need to do is make the youth allowance more readily available and have more courses available at campuses such as Monash Uni and Frankston, and we solve the problem of access because we have funding, and we will have greater variety of education.' In fact, as I started to study it, I realised that those two issues were not the real issues at all. If we are going to look at why young people in interface council areas, or even in rural areas, are not connecting well into higher education, we have to really look at the careers counselling and careers advice that occurs within secondary schools.

On page 4 of our submission you will see a table which best explains what I am about to talk about. You will see the careers allocation varies dramatically between schools. It has nothing to do with school size; it has nothing to do with the academic outcomes of the schools. It is random. The careers allocation, the time allocation in schools, is according to how readily a faculty is able to argue for a better allocation for their resources. It depends upon each and every school—individual personalities—as to what they consider to be the most important issues within their own school.

It also surprised me to find that some schools had as little as two hours per week of careers advice. An example that was given to me on Friday was that of a year 12 student who was battling to try and work out what courses they might do for the study that they wanted to pursue. They are interested in doing film production and directing, and all those areas. They have to make a booking one month in advance to see the careers teacher because the careers teacher is currently engaged in helping year 10 students make their choices about what to study for the future. At that school the careers teacher is available for two hours per week. That is the time allocation.

Also, our careers teachers tend to be senior teachers, in the main. They tend to have worked as teachers for quite some years. They have had an interest in careers and better outcomes for their students, and they have done a little bit of work with regard to courses and how subjects and course materials connect up. They are not trained specialists in the areas of careers. I think that is a key element. For far too long, successive governments have committed funds into our schools for subjects like student welfare and careers, and those areas usually engage senior teachers, so you are talking about people on high incomes—\$85,000 per annum—and they are unskilled and untrained in the areas that they are working in. I do not know in what other profession we allow that to be the case.

If we look at student welfare coordinators costing \$85,000 a year, a qualified youth worker will cost \$47,000 per annum and they are trained and skilled to do that job. If we look at careers and we look at human resource people, you can pick up a good human resource person who can do an analytical assessment of people for around \$56,000 per annum. We have unskilled people playing key roles in our schools in guiding and influencing the young people in making decisions about their future.

Also it is a bit of pick and choose as to what occurs with subject material. We do not assess the young person as to their predisposition towards certain subject areas. We look at how they have performed in certain subjects in the past and use that as a guide as to how they may perform in the future and then try to persuade them into certain areas of study that will help them achieve an outcome of passing VCE. Passing VCE is not a ticket into tertiary education; it is simply passing VCE. That has been one of the problems that we have had in the past. The critical aspect of getting into higher education is your TER score and the critical aspect of being able to maintain your existence in higher education is your TER score.

There is a report by the longitudinal study into Australia's youth that states quite clearly—and it is detailed in here—that if you have a TER score above 90 per cent you have a 94 per cent chance of completing your course. However, a 20 per cent drop in your TER score leads to a 200 per cent decrease in your ability to complete your course. There are also subjects that are related to people completing courses. Completing courses is a critical aspect of the whole issue of young people participating in higher education, and those areas are where we have our greatest skills shortages in this country. It is amazing that the courses that have the highest completion rate have the highest skills shortages. Agriculture, business studies, teaching and medicine are the subjects that have the highest completion rates and yet we have shortages. They have high

TER entry scores.

If we are able to work with young people with better careers advice, with some psychoanalytical processes to be able to assess a person's aptitude towards certain subjects, then we are able to help them and guide and direct them in an informed capacity, not in the guessing capacity which currently exists. If we can help young people play to their strengths, then we have the ability to have young people increase their TER scores and therefore have a greater opportunity of participating in those areas of education. Naturally, if you increase TER scores, everyone is going to have higher TER scores so the competition becomes greater. How do we overcome that problem?

These are areas where we have shortages of skills. The Australian Farmers Federation is talking about the possibility of agriculture being short of 10,000 workers because of people going into the mining industry. They are no longer small shortages that we have. They are ones where, if we can increase a person's ability to access those areas of education, we have a greater opportunity of those young people getting into study, being interested in and completing that study.

That is our first point: work in secondary schools, starting at year level 10, and look at vocational development and have a thrust on the whole issue of vocational development; put the resources there, not have fragmented bits and pieces; not have a bit of a try at a VET program, a bit of VCAL and a bit of transition but have a concerted effort into vocational development and work with the young people so that they, their families and their educators can make informed decisions about career paths.

The second part of our submission talks about the successful elements that are essential for someone to continue in higher education. In that regard, there are also some longitudinal studies that have been done. They were quite surprising. They talk about students who work more than 20 hours per week are more likely to drop out of tertiary education. They talk about those on youth allowance having the highest dropout rates, which is quite extraordinary because most people on youth allowance do not work. So you have people working more than 20 hours per week and people who are not working at all being the most likely two groups to drop out of tertiary education.

It talks about accommodation. The average price for accommodation on a university campus is \$8,500 per annum. It is a high cost. Students can get loans, yes, but then they have HECS fees. Do we want to have an indebted generation that is going to be struggling? What incentives are there in that? I am a product of a time when there were no fees. There were studentships, there were scholarships, and you were encouraged to participate in higher education through those processes. What we have concluded, from looking through the studies and looking at the groups that are the most likely to drop out of tertiary education and move away from it—and the Queensland University of Technology has done some studies—is that scholarships have one of the lowest dropout rates. So, if tertiary education were targeted and the support were targeted within tertiary education, we think there is an opportunity for potential beneficial outcomes for the young people.

Scholarships should be inclusive of an adequate accommodation allowance so that we are building an incentive for the young person. With scholarships, if people do not complete their study, they have to repay them, so there is an incentive to continue to participate in the whole process. You are putting incentives in there to participate, to encourage and to move forward with a supportive environment. The other aspect of that is that if we had more accommodation allowances, then we would have the potential for developers and others to build more accommodation on university campuses and create an environment, working with the universities, that would provide more support for those coming from interface or outer rural areas to the tertiary institutions.

In the days of old, people did that quite frequently. They came to nurses' colleges. Where were the nurses' schools? They were all in hospitals and the nurses lived in the accommodation at the hospitals. For many young people, that was their first experience in moving away from home and they came into a supportive environment attached to where they were learning.

The same occurred in teachers' colleges. Teachers' colleges were spread around rural areas—Bendigo, Ballarat, Gippsland, down at Churchill, Frankston—so young people were coming into areas that were not a great distance away; they had supportive environments, accommodation provided and, in those days, they

worked through on studentships with the schools. Those studentships were an interesting concept. You were paid to study and at the end of it the payback was that you had to agree to work for the department of education for five years, minimum. That was your contract. So a supportive environment has the potential to build incentives for participation and to encourage people. That is the basis of our submission to you.

**The CHAIR**—Thanks, David. Anybody with some questions?

**Mr HERBERT**—Thank you very much, David, for your report. One aspect you were talking about was the issue of university courses or course load being linked to areas of skill or intellectual or vocational shortage. Can I assume from what you have said that you believe there is not a great connection in terms of universities linking their course load to skill shortages?

**Mr CONLEY**—I think the problem has been the TER scores for the areas that have the greatest shortages. For example, agriculture, law, computing, education, engineering and medical services are the areas with the lowest dropout rate. They also have the highest TER scores. When you have economic disadvantage, there are factors that lead to people having lower ENTER scores, so we are not seeing young people within many of our communities being able to gain those ENTER scores. We believe that, if there were vocational development in the secondary schools and those young people could have incentives built in for them, then there would be the opportunity to encourage them to work harder and to play to their strengths.

We accept that, if a young person has a particular talent in a sporting pursuit or in the arts, then they can go into specialised things like the Institute of Sport or the cricket academies and all those different places; you play to your strengths. We do not do that on the academic ground. I think there is the potential to encourage young people, even from socially disadvantaged areas, to participate in and pursue those areas where we have the shortages.

**Mr HERBERT**—Yes, but presumably if there were more course offerings in those shortages, if universities shifted their - is it course load?

**Mr CONLEY**—Sorry, yes.

**Mr HERBERT**—Where I am coming from is twofold: (1) would you see it appropriate for the federal government to have more say in the course load in terms of the funding of universities; and (2) in your own case, for instance, you would obviously be concerned about skill shortages on the peninsula. Do you speak with Monash, for instance, about the sorts of courses you would like to see a greater emphasis on for young people here to access?

**Mr CONLEY**—Yes. That is a very interesting question. We have computing shortages now. The universities said, 'People are developing skills now in schools on laptop computers and things and we are not going to need people in the computing area into the future,' when in fact we need very sophisticated people in those areas. The universities actually closed courses and redirected their resources to other places. We do not have a true employment strategy in the country. If we had an employment strategy tied to an education strategy, the two would actually develop in sync.

When it comes to an institute like Monash University and Frankston campus having a greater diversity of courses, yes, that would help, but given that the ENTER score is the key factor in how people get in to tertiary education, there is still the issue of improved ENTER scores to be able to access that. For many young people down in this area, when it comes time for them to get offers from the universities, they are often offers in Warrnambool at Deakin University, maybe Bendigo at La Trobe University, up over the border at Charles Sturt University.

University of Hobart has been a popular one for kids down here, and that is because the ENTER scores have been between the high 50s to the low 70s and they have been the only places they have been able to access. So I think it is a combination of an employment strategy and also working through the issues of the true skill shortages.

**The DEPUTY CHAIR**—Is there a transport problem or need in the region?

**Mr CONLEY**—Is there an area that does not have a transport problem? There is a serious transport problem that the Department of Infrastructure—is it?—have been working on in regard to the peninsula.

**Mr HERBERT**—Department of Transport. It is called DOT.

**Mr CONLEY**—That is right, DOT. One of the issues is that young people find it very hard to even get to Monash University in Frankston, if they live down at Rye, because the buses go up Point Nepean Road into Frankston and then you have to get another bus around to Monash University, or walk some distance to the university. What has been looked at is an express bus that would go from Dromana up the freeway, straight into Monash University, then Frankston hospital, then Frankston station, with different bus routes and combinations along the way, to help improve that situation. But it is extremely challenging for young people to be able to get to any of the tertiary institutions. In fact, if you are going up to Melbourne you might have to get a six o'clock bus out of Rosebud to be able to get to RMIT by nine o'clock.

**Mr CAUCHI**—Clearly the transportation problem is one that we share with our interface colleagues and it is a factor in the increasing number of young people who actually do get a university place but are dropping out later on. We are becoming alarmed at the number that are dropping out of university places.

**Mr CONLEY**—There is a lot of research which says that, if you have got to travel more than 90 minutes to get to university, the chances of dropping out are increased by around 100 per cent, I think it is, from the *Stay, play or give it away?* report. So 90 minutes is a key time frame. I have talked to people at Swinburne University, who often attract young people from this area, and they are concerned that dropouts tend to occur about mid second semester. People get burnt out in travelling every day, which is usually about two and a half, three hours' travel each way.

**Mr ELASMAR**—David, you mentioned extra allowance and extra accommodation. Do we have a problem with shortages of accommodation at this moment?

**Mr CONLEY**—It is more the cost of the accommodation in tertiary institutions. The cost is a huge barrier. There are shortages up in Melbourne. One of the things that is often talked about by parents of young people that we work with—and I manage council's youth services team—is that they are not sure how they are going to finance it and how they can access accommodation up in Melbourne, unless there is a relative or a trusted family who can take a young person in. The accommodation on campuses is expensive. There are shortages at times. A lot of people are anxious about that with someone moving away from home for the first time. I am basing it more on being able to motivate more people to participate in education and, if we are able to provide a better accommodation allowance, then we have the ability to have more accommodation built to satisfy that need; an incentive for everyone.

**Mr CAUCHI**—If young people have to compete in the rental market with others then it is very difficult. You all know what is happening in the rental area.

**The CHAIR**—I notice, in regard to this area, you have a much lower year 12 completion rate than Melbourne metro, for example. I am wondering what you might attribute that to. Why is that the case?

**Mr CONLEY**—Certainly social disadvantage is an aspect of that. There is also a problem that occurs where people do not see any point in going on to further education. We have also been in many ways fortunate here with regard to the building boom that has occurred, with people who dropped out of school readily being able to get jobs. Unfortunately, they tended to be the unskilled jobs and they are the jobs that go first when the building industry changes.

So people often leave school, they will get a high-paying job working on a building site; they do not develop any skills and they are cut off very quickly. When we had the last economic downturn, this area was absolutely shattered. We had youth unemployment here at over 50 per cent; we had general unemployment over 20 per cent. The reason was that so many people were involved in the unskilled areas of employment. So we are an area that can make it along whilst the economic conditions are good, but as soon as there is a downside we really have huge problems.

So young people see their friends leave school and get a reasonable amount of money. They are battling away at school and do not really think that they are going to get into a university that suits them or that they are really interested in, so they tend to not complete and go out with their friends and get a job on a building site or in tourism.

**Cr GIBB**—David, I would suggest that another factor, which is common with all rural areas of Victoria, is a very high concentration of home computers on the Mornington Peninsula, which is a significant disincentive to getting the task done at school.

**Mr CAUCHI**—Part of completing school is that sense of personal confidence, sense of self, sense of optimism for what the future might bring for you, and I think that was underscored by Western Port Secondary College. We have had one of the highest year 10 dropout rates, which has been turned around quite successfully, as a result of a program they introduced with the Beacon Foundation, where kids are linked in with businesses and potential employers. It is a program which discourages going on the dole and develops a sense of hope for their future, and it has worked tremendously there.

**Mr DIXON**—David, could you describe the part-time work opportunities there are down here for young people to supplement their costs for further education.

**Mr CONLEY**—The part-time work opportunities down here are varied: working on the farms with horses—there is a big horse industry around here; working part time and seasonally in tourism; vineyards on weekends. I have forgotten how many vineyards we have but quite a lot. You should do a tour.

**Mr DIXON**—Two hundred.

**Mr CONLEY**—Two hundred, is it? Martin has tried every one of them! There is a lot of part-time employment available in those areas, but also in the construction area with the building projects that have been under way and they move from place to place; even on those there are lot of part-time jobs available. People can go in and work on a Saturday or a Sunday on a building site down at Mount Martha.

**The DEPUTY CHAIR**—What are the aspirations of the parents in this region? Do parents want their children to go on? Do they want them to go to work when they complete year 12 or leave at year 11?

**Mr CONLEY**—That is an interesting question, Nick. Most parents really want to see their kids end up better than what they are and go a step further. But we have some of the lowest income areas in the state. Rosebud West is the third poorest according to the Jesuit Social Services study. We have Rosebud and Hastings following after, so spread around the peninsula we have very low-income areas. In low-income areas people are often generationally trapped into disadvantage, so we have a lot of kids that grow up in an environment where no-one goes to work; where no-one has worked. Even though the parents are interested in their children doing better, sometimes they lack the skills to be able to take that to the next level.

We have a very vibrant school attendance working group in this community. It has been going for about four years. When it started, we had the worst school attendance rates in the state by far. No-one was near us. We now have pretty good school attendance rates—about the middle range—and that has been as a result of a concerted campaign. There are billboards all over the place saying it is not okay to be away. It was interesting: we surveyed a lot of kids to find out why they were not attending school, and one of the areas that stood out most of all was what was happening in the family home. If mum had a bad night—there might have been a partner there who had abused her or something—the kids would not go to school. If there was no money for petrol for the car, the kids did not go to school. If they thought mum was sad, they did not go to school. There was a real dependence upon the issues at home as to whether or not they got to school. That surprised us, so we have tried working with that and making schools a bit friendlier for families to come along to and talk about issues within that context.

If we can continue to build in that area, we can build aspirations amongst that generation of parents. That has been a key factor. With other parents, it is more a financial struggle. We have areas like Mornington East which are huge mortgage belt areas, and people are doing it really hard in those areas. Within those areas,

there are people who really want their kids to go on and participate, and they are the people who talk to us about their children who have to be away from school for 18 months to qualify for the youth allowance. We know through the stats that the youth allowance is not the answer, but they talk about the financial issues. I think if there was a more supportive and a more secure environment for them with their children going on into tertiary education, they would be pushing it more heavily.

**The DEPUTY CHAIR**—Okay. Do you have one last question?

**Mr HERBERT**—Thank you. My question is on a similar vein. I worked in public housing for a while and, put simply, if parents were not working, they were not used to setting an alarm clock and they would not wake the kids up to go to school. Is there much happening in terms of trying to aid aspirations in schools? You talked about a careers approach. Is there scope for a type of approach to lift students' tertiary aspirations?

**Mr CONLEY**—A lot of primary schools are working on the whole issue of aspirations. They are changing the language that is used; they are trying to put forward positive messages about coming to school, participating in school and going on. Within secondary schools, there are some attempts, like VCAL and VET, but as you would see from that chart, it is really ad hoc. When I talked to a few principals about this inquiry, their comment was, 'Well, we can't even fix our VET problems.' One of the problems with VET is that, for a lot of young people who schools think should be participating in it, there are cost barriers and those young people are not participating in it for that reason.

There seems to be a cloud over a lot of schools. They have a desire—like Western Port Secondary College with the Beacon program—to try and get people to believe that they can go on and they can achieve, and they certainly participate in careers expos and careers ventures, but then it falls over a little bit—'Well, we're doing that, but the reality is it's probably not going to improve things much'—which I think is sad. I think that is a really sad approach because I think there is a lot that can be done. We need to be able to, within the schools, lift the profile of careers and lift the relevance of vocational development, and I think that would inspire the educators at year 10, year 11 and year 12 levels to really go ahead and believe that their students are going to go on and achieve. If you could build that belief and build that emphasis, and do it on the basis of informed decision making, then I think the capacity is there to do exactly that.

**The CHAIR**—We might leave it there. We need to keep ourselves on track with our timing today.

**Witnesses withdrew.**

**Hearing suspended.**



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### **Inquiry into geographical differences in the rate in which Victorian students participate in higher education**

Rosebud—12 May 2008

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#### Witnesses

Mr S. Wright, Executive Officer,

Mr S. Dwyer, Coordinator, Peninsula Training and Employment Program, and

Ms J. Cairns, Student, Community VCAL

**The CHAIR**—Thank you for coming along this morning to speak to us in regard to our inquiry, as the Education and Training Committee, into geographic variations in students going on to higher education. It is good to get the Community VCAL perspective on this. We welcome your input.

**Mr DWYER**—I will start off. The original Hastings group was made up entirely of disengaged youth that just did not want to be at their school, which is Western Port Secondary College. The same can be said for our second campus which started this year in Rosebud. The Western Port Secondary College group started in the fourth term of 2006 with 12 enrolled students, eight of who were active participants.

As the word of Community VCAL spread, students have appeared from various other sources, such as the Brotherhood of St Laurence, the Salvation Army, Youth Justice, Auschild, DHS, various employment agencies and, probably most significantly, word of mouth. As Community VCAL grows and becomes part of the educational infrastructure, the nature of the student body too is evolving. Initially, envisage kids that just did not want to be at school turning up; the nature of those students is now changing as we are becoming more entrenched in the environment.

From disengaged and disadvantaged youth, a more centred and focused student is emerging. The traditional sexual disparity is, too, changing. For example, last week in Hastings, in a class size of 25, 13 were female. This is the first time in our experience that girls have outnumbered boys in any circumstances. Our alternative structure includes formal class time from 9 a.m. until 1 p.m., with staff available for private tuition until 3 p.m. We consider the 1 p.m. to 3 p.m. timeslot is almost like an internet cafe; it keeps these kids engaged; off the street, literally; and the teachers are available if they require it. Sometimes that is taken advantage of, but there is a little bit of peer pressure that these kids feel—'Who's hanging back?', 'Who's keen?'—and that is also breaking down as the group enlarges and changes.

We made these our class hours due to the students' inability to have any useful input in any way of an afternoon. They see it as a win, due to finishing early, but the reality is that when you take into account recess, lunch, breaks between classes, and at the beginning of each class the teacher spends at least 10 minutes settling that class down, they are only missing 20 minutes of a normal school day and, in reality, they are getting more teacher time because they are there for that period. They can come and go. If they need to go to the toilet or they want to go and have a fag or something, they can get up and go out and do that, but they always come back and centre themselves. It is actually quite amazing, the way they do that.

We feel that this timetable, in conjunction with the use of and friendly nature of the VCAL curriculum, may be responsible for our attendance averaging over 70 per cent and a retention rate in Hastings of 80 per cent. Once again, these kids did not want to be at school. They wanted something different. They hated the whole nature of a school day being broken up into class times, and the structure of a school. Because we are more flexible in our structure, maybe they feel more at home. But they are coming, and they did not go to school. That is my point: these guys come.

We operate a fully integrated curriculum, incorporating all aspects and outcomes of the VCAL program. Every class we present has relevant outcomes attached to it. Sometimes the kids will look at what we do as very mickey mouse, but we explain the outcomes to them before each class: 'This is why we're doing it. This is what it's all about.' We keep records of the outcomes students have reached throughout the course of the year so that at any stage they can check, or, alternatively, we can check. If kids have missed classes, we know how to go back and find out if their outcomes are met.

With limited resources and, honestly, little support from the schools, the internet has become our main source of information and our primary educational tool. With that in mind, we purchased 30 laptops at the beginning of the year. We had 10 stolen in February, and that put a bit of pressure on us. We have put in an insurance claim to get those 10 back, which it looks like we will be successful in doing. We have a combined total of about 40 laptops and about a dozen PCs. We have a student body of 62 enrolments across the two campuses and we aim to have a computer available for each student on a daily basis, and, due to the nature of these kids coming and going—even though they have a fairly good attendance rate—we manage to achieve that. We funded that ourselves, with some support from ACBI, who have lent us computers, but ultimately it is out of our pocket.

The encompassing nature of VCAL has enabled us to create and nurture relationships within our broader community, with projects such as the construction of a bike shed at a local primary school in Hastings and the development of a community garden and a community kitchen integral in the success of those relationships. These projects have aided and enhanced our standing within the community, have developed closer ties with existing support structures and generally helped to raise the community's awareness of our course. We are also regular attendees at various community meetings—for instance, the Hastings neighbourhood renewal safety committee. I will briefly tell you about our contact with West Park Primary School.

West Park is a notoriously graffitied and trashed school, shall we say, at weekends. The nature of the Community VCAL student is that they are more likely going to be some of the young people you will see in the security cameras, and I have picked out some of my students at various times on those security cameras, which is a little bit tragic, but that is just the reality. What we decided to do was to try to give the kids a little bit of ownership of that school; not just to use it to have a couple of cans of Jim Beam on a Friday night but to actually protect it a bit. So far so good. Whilst we have not actually finished anything just yet, the kids are turning up to those various projects and are interested, and the feeling I have is that they are going to take a little bit of ownership of what we do there, and maybe the benefits for the school will be less graffiti of a weekend.

My experience is that, generally, the business community is unaware of the existence of VCAL. The time spent with managers in explaining the many and varied benefits of the program is always rewarding. I recently placed a young lad at Peninsula Bus Lines to do a work experience program. We set our work experience up on a weekly basis. Some schools will do it in a block, but my experience—and I am not just an educator; I also have quite a lot of experience in business—is that if a student becomes used to the concept of work, and it becomes part of their life to go to work, they are more likely to have success out of work experience. The word from Louise at Peninsula Bus Lines is that the boy we have placed there, who has been there three or four times, is already being lined up for an apprenticeship.

That is an outcome, but that is an outcome that is not considered an outcome educationally. The education department decides that outcomes from VCAL are whether they finished the units or whether they have attended, but the reality is that the real outcome for Community VCAL students is engagement in employment; it is the provision of a pathway and that that pathway is actually seen through. That is a problem within Community VCAL. We had 42 kids go through Hastings last year, of which 26 were attending by the end of the year and, of that 26, I think 22 came back this year, which is a retention rate that is almost phenomenal in Community VCAL.

That looks good on paper, but the reality was that, of the kids that did not come back, only three of them dropped out. The rest of them either received apprenticeships; moved to other parts of the state for a job; received traineeships; took on more employment from McDonald's, for instance. There were real outcomes that just were not counted, and I find that almost insulting.

The support from industry, once we have explained what it is all about, can take the form of work experience access; ASBA placements, of which we have four; and, ultimately, the creation of a position for a student. Last year our program had difficulty engaging students in work experience. The employers' lack of knowledge, in conjunction with our students' lack of qualifications, made this important part of the course all but prohibitive. Upon consultation with various captains of industry, we decided to offer all students courses such as a Certificate II in First Aid, a Certificate I in OH&S, a Responsible Service of Alcohol certificate, and a Safe Food Handling certificate. The response from potential employers has been very positive; in fact, doing this has opened more doors. The student body has supported the process because they see the relevance of getting certificates into a resume, and, almost more importantly, other providers within the southern region have undertaken to include this concept as part of their program going forward as a matter of course.

Community VCAL students are generally not looking for university placements. Their focus is more on a TAFE. They see that TAFE will provide further education relevant to their chosen field of employment, usually as part of an apprenticeship. I asked my students the other day, 'Who wants to go to university?' One fellow put his hand up and he said, 'I want to be a doctor,' so I took him aside and said, 'You shouldn't be doing VCAL, son.' None of them want to go to uni. It is off their radar. It has been off their radar for a long time, too. For these students, experience and, ultimately, gainful employment is their preferred educational

outcome. What Community VCAL needs is ongoing structured support to create and encourage successful completion of that chosen pathway. That is what David said before. We need that support in the pathways. Whether that pathway is to a university, a TAFE, a job, we do not really have it.

Community VCAL on the Mornington Peninsula began in the fourth term of 2006 at the Western Port Business Centre with eight students. By our second birthday, we envisaged an enrolled student population of 100 based in three campuses—Hastings, Rosebud and Mornington, which is opening on 26 May 2008. Thank you.

**Mr WRIGHT**—I will continue with just a couple of points from what Simon has said. If we go back to where we started VCAL, Pat O'Connell from the LLEN and I got together in about August of 2006 and decided that there was a gap at Western Port Secondary College with kids falling through the net. In meetings with Western Port Secondary College we decided that every student had to have some sort of pathway. We needed to provide some further study arrangements for the students that had no pathway or had not had a successful outcome, and VCAL was certainly the vehicle preferred.

**The CHAIR**—Can I just get you to go back a step further. What is Peninsula Training and Employment Program?

**Mr WRIGHT**—We are a registered training organisation. We have been around since 1979, 1980. We originated as a Community Youth Support Scheme, for those with good memories. We then developed into a SkillShare, which was a federally funded program. From there we had a Job Network contract for a short time and now we are just a registered training organisation delivering training to mature aged, children, students et cetera. We have a number of sites across the peninsula and a couple of sites in Melbourne at Moorabbin and Dandenong. We were asked midway through 2006, through the LLEN and Western Port Secondary College, if we could run a Community VCAL. We saw a strong need for it and with a small grant from the department of education we started up a four-month program of VCAL in the latter stages of 2006. We had 12 kids enrolled and I think eight consistent attendees.

From there for 2007 we said, 'We can see the gap. We can see that we're plugging a hole there and providing reasonable service. We'll undertake to do VCAL for 2007.' We were inundated from the start of 2007. We thought we would get about 20 kids. We ended up with 42. Given that, we see that there is a strong demand and therefore the demand on infrastructure also is quite strong. At the start of this year, we went out and acquired our 45 laptops and 10 desktop computers for the students to use. We find that the internet is one of the best learning tools available to these kids. Most of them are at home on the internet and there are good learning frameworks to access through the internet.

We have had problems, and this is part of the reason I see this communication as being important. We have had to go on our own behalf and negotiate a financial arrangement with the principals of the secondary colleges where we are running these Community VCALs. At the moment, schools receive what they call a global budget per student, where they get X amount of dollars per student. If those students are in a Community VCAL, the schools fund us a certain amount of money to provide the VCAL services.

Each school across Victoria takes a varying amount of money out of that global funding budget to provide administrative work—that is, putting the student details on the BAS system and another couple of administrative duties—and that amount of money is negotiated between myself or the head of another Community VCAL and the individual principals. There are no set parameters or formulae for evolving this funding. It is simply a negotiated thing between the principal and myself, for example.

The amount of money that the schools retain per student can vary from zero, if the school is quite benevolent, up to \$1,000. The schools that we are dealing with take about \$900 per student to do the administrative work. We have 60 students this year. If you figure out what 60 by that is, it is a heck of a lot of money for doing a couple of days of BAS entries on the computer to put these kids into the system. We do not have a library or a bus. We do not have the infrastructure to look after the kids at lunchtime. We do not have access to any extra funds for extracurricular activities; things like running a health initiative, say, with girls being inoculated against cervical cancer or something like that. We do not have the resources to put them all in a bus—'Let's go to the health service'—and all those sorts of things. We are underresourced. We are leading the way in that we

are having to provide these innovations which are basically unfunded or there is no set precedent for them: things like offering all our students a Certificate II in First Aid, the Responsible Service of Alcohol certificate and Food Handling across the board so every student gets that. There are not many other VCALs who do that. We have done it because we can and we see immense benefits to the students. They all start on the same level playing field.

Policy that deals with VCAL is evolving because VCAL is a new program. It has only been around for five years. There is no set formula by which a Community VCAL is funded. The quicker the Community VCAL has stand-alone funding and gets away from the dependency of working with the school would be ideal. It does warrant an increase in the amount of money per student that we are delivering to them at the moment. These kids are in the too-hard basket. These are the kids that the schools have shunned or cannot deal with or work with. We have come along and picked them up and, as Simon said, we have 70 per cent or 80 per cent retention rate with these kids. Normally they would not be at school; they would be wandering the streets. It always puzzles me because if we are doing it now, what was happening five years ago? Where were they 10 years ago? Hopefully the statistics of crime rates, vandalism and all that sort of stuff are slowly coming down with the retention of the VCAL students into school.

The provision of a pathway, to me, is a priority. To have a student know that they can go from one step to the next then the next and have a proper achievable and productive pathway into either further education or into training and eventually into work is critical. We have identified at least half a dozen kids this year and put them onto Australian School Based Apprenticeships. We see that as a very productive pathway to get the kids out of VCAL and into the workforce in an achievable way. As Simon said, most of the kids do not want to go to university so there has to be some sort of pathway put in place for those kids. VCAL is certainly the right vehicle to do that. Thank you.

**The CHAIR**—Perhaps we should, since Jasmine is here, hear your story and how you are finding Community VCAL and so on.

**Ms CAIRNS**—I live in Dromana at the moment. I left home when I was 13, ended up leaving school at 15, the legal age, and got out and got a job because I did not have enough support for myself. I had to support myself by getting a job. I then ended up going to Queensland. I came back to Victoria and then went back up again to Queensland. I have had waitressing jobs, fast food; stuff like that. Then at the start of this year I returned to Victoria.

**The CHAIR**—How old are you now?

**Ms CAIRNS**—Nearly 18. I decided that waitressing was not going to be my life so I started VCAL. I had a few options put to me, and Community VCAL was the way for me; it fitted in with me being able to work at the same time. I have never really thought about going to uni because it has never been an option that I thought I had. Community VCAL was good for me because I do not need that pass to university, and through VCAL I think I can get the education I need to get into a profession and have a good career.

**The CHAIR**—What are the sorts of subjects that you have been doing? What is your aim, in terms of where you are going?

**Ms CAIRNS**—Through VCAL I have been doing hospitality but I am still not sure what I want to do. I just know that I do not want to be in fast food or something like that for the rest of my life.

**Mr DIXON**—Jasmine, how did you find out about VCAL? You said that somebody gave you a few options.

**Ms CAIRNS**—One day my mother was going to Mount Erin Secondary College in Somerville to talk about my younger brother and sister and their education. It was just by chance that I heard what their options were and I chose to go into Community VCAL as well.

**Mr DIXON**—You attend here at Rosebud, do you?

**Ms CAIRNS**—No, I attend in Hastings.

**Mr DIXON**—How do you get there?

**Ms CAIRNS**—Simon; or I catch the bus. To get to Hastings, I have to bypass Frankston.

**Mr DIXON**—You have to go via Frankston. How long does that take?

**Ms CAIRNS**—An hour and a half, two hours sometimes—there and back.

**Mr DWYER**—There is no public transport from Dromana to Hastings.

**Ms CAIRNS**—Yes, it is very hard—and also working; I never have a day off really. I do school and work.

**Mr DIXON**—Good on you.

**The DEPUTY CHAIR**—Is there anything in VCAL that you would like to see improved?

**Ms CAIRNS**—The kids want to be there but I guess they do not have enough resources, enough time; getting more things done. Sorry, I do not know how to explain it properly.

**Mr ELASMAR**—Simon, if Jasmine was over 19, what would you have done? Would you have taken her?

**Mr DWYER**—We can take them up to 20.

**Mr WRIGHT**—But over 20, we would possibly put her on an adult training course, a short course, or a certificate course of some sort. It might be the Certificate III in Hospitality Operations, the full qualification, and she can see the career paths that emanate from there. But certainly in terms of education and literacy and numeracy type skills, after 19 there are not a lot of resources and options around for those students. That pathway becomes a dead end, if we are looking at that pathway. But the pathways onto work in further ed. are still there.

**Mr DIXON**—Steve, what is the ideal type of setting for Community VCAL? Do you think it should be attached to or part of a school, or totally removed? If you were to give an answer, what would it be?

**Mr WRIGHT**—We have been in it for not quite two years so we are still new at the game. But we feel as though we are quite experienced. Our experience has been that the more we make VCAL like school, the less the kids like it. So if it is made totally opposite to school, the kids will really respond. So, therefore, in terms of physical site, it should be away from a school, off the campus.

**The CHAIR**—How did you come by your present sites?

**Mr WRIGHT**—We rent them on a commercial basis.

**The CHAIR**—What were they before you rented them? Were they just office spaces?

**Mr WRIGHT**—Office spaces; we are renting a church, except for the altar area.

**The CHAIR**—That is different to a school.

**Mr WRIGHT**—It enables us to break out into a big room similar to this. We have to pay the rents and they are on a commercial basis. We do not get any sort of discount at all; we have tried, pushed it. But commercial renters being as they are, if it is not us it will be the next person. So that is not a level playing field to start with. In terms of a facility, the better the facilities are the better the kids respond. If we put kids in a dump, they will treat it as a dump and respond accordingly; if we put them in a good place that looks good,

that is heated, cooled and is neat and tidy—it does not have to be palatial—then we will get a positive response from the kids. But away from the school is preferable, mainly because most of the kids have had enough of school.

**Mr DWYER**—When it comes time for enrolment, we have to enrol them through schools so that we get our funding. They hate that: 'I've left that school. Why am I signing on to this school again?' I explain, 'It is just so that we can run our course and at this time you have to be enrolled through Western Port' or Rosebud. Reluctantly they do it—'Long as I don't have to go there.' The reality is that the schools do not want them there anyway.

**Mr WRIGHT**—Funding for our students is the biggest issue that we have. There is no consistency in it. It is about whether we have a good relationship with the local feeder school or not: if we do not, then they can charge us \$1,000 per head. If the school is very benevolent, they can do it for nothing.

**The CHAIR**—Why is it that you are not able to enrol them in the schools that you have got good relationships with?

**Mr DWYER**—Because they want the money.

**Mr WRIGHT**—There is a bit of geographical ownership. If kids are ex-Western Port Secondary College students, Western Port are quite happy to keep them on, but if they are Rosebud students, Western Port would be slightly hesitant to keep them on because Rosebud would like to keep them. There is a bit of ownership there.

**Mr HALL**—What is the extent of Community VCAL across Victoria?

**Mr WRIGHT**—There are 2½ thousand kids, I think, across Victoria in a Community VCAL. There are 22,000 in year 11 and 12 and of that about 11 per cent I think are Community VCALs.

**Mr HALL**—Are they kids that are totally disengaged from their school?

**Mr WRIGHT**—Yes.

**Mr DWYER**—Generally, yes.

**Mr HALL**—There is no connection back to their school? They would not be doing English or something like that back at the school?

**Mr DWYER**—Some of my students attend VET courses at schools. I have got one guy from Hastings who goes across to Mount Eliza for music. We have got Jasmine's sister who goes up to Mount Erin. Well, actually she does not: she is doing an ASBA but she is still enrolled through the VET course there. I have got kids from Rosebud who go to Dromana and Mount Erin to do their courses. But they cost. Those families have paid up to \$1,800 for each VET course. We offer IT and hospitality for free; we are able to, I suppose is the bottom line, because we are an RTO.

**Mr WRIGHT**—We make sure we offer it for free because we do not feel as though we can ask the kids to pay those exorbitant costs.

**Mr DWYER**—Not these kids, not the kids of these families where they are coming from. These are the disadvantaged people of the community and to slug them another \$1,800 to do a course that is essential for their VCAL just does not seem right.

**Mr WRIGHT**—It is also one of the reasons why they have not continued at school.

**Mr HALL**—The legal impediment to you enrolling students is because you are not a registered school, I suppose.

**Mr WRIGHT**—No, not really, because we have memorandums of understanding with each school that we work with. We are a registered training organisation ourselves and we have gone through a compliance process to make sure that we are VCAL compliant. We are a licensed school basically.

**Mr HALL**—So why can't you enrol students if you are a licensed registered school?

**Mr WRIGHT**—We are not a licensed registered school as a school is registered. We do not have the same status as a school. We have the same status as a TAFE, as a registered training organisation. That does not allow us to access the education department's global funding system. In the first instance, we are reliant on the school and us to have that agreement so that they eventually hand over some funds to us to provide the services for the kids.

**Mr HALL**—My understanding is that if you are a TAFE institute providing VCE, for example, then the funding goes directly to the TAFE institute.

**Mr WRIGHT**—Yes, but—

**Mr HALL**—Maybe we can explore the mechanism by which you as an organisation are unable to receive direct funding for the students undertaking your programs.

**Mr WRIGHT**—If we could receive direct funding from the education department, that would solve a range of problems, including this unlevel playing field with the schools. There is a government initiative called Youth Guarantee. I am not sure if you are aware of Youth Guarantee, but, if we deliver a whole lot of services to young people this year, Youth Guarantee actually pays us to deliver those services the following year. So we have to wear the cost of this current year delivering Youth Guarantee services and we will not get paid for them until March, April, May of next year.

**Mr HALL**—What is the issue about the age limit of 19, that you are only allowed to take on kids up to the age of 19?

**Mr WRIGHT**—That is in line with the school policy, I believe. The minimum school leaving age now is 16. It was 15. I do not know why there is a maximum, but it is in line with VCE, I guess: that for the VCAL you need to be under 20. I see that as a restriction as well.

**Mr HALL**—It is simply based on the enrolment age for secondary college.

**Mr WRIGHT**—Yes.

**Mr DWYER**—The real situation that I am experiencing now is the reverse age. I get phone calls on a weekly basis from families with 15-, 14- and 13-year-olds who need something and we cannot take them. We are not allowed to take them unless they are 16, and there is a whole batch of kids out there who are about to miss the boat, and, unless they stay reasonably motivated and out of trouble, I can get them next year or the year after. But that is a real problem on the peninsula, I can guarantee that, and that is festering.

**Mr HALL**—So nobody is picking them up.

**Mr DWYER**—No. They are just not going to school. If they are from Hastings or on the other side—you jump on the Frankston train any day and you will see 15, 20 kids, who should be at school, riding that train back and forth. They probably have not got tickets either, by the way. And it is a problem over here, too, because I am getting phone calls from distraught parents. That is another thing. The schools, with all due respect to them—I can speak openly here—they really wash their hands too quickly of some kids. I had one student who was bounced around three schools at the beginning of this year until eventually the person in charge of the southern region contacted me personally and said, 'Will you take this boy?' and I said, 'Well, of course.'

We do not close our doors. Our funding finished last Monday, essentially. That was our census day. But we do not close our doors for the entire year. We cannot. Morally, Steve and I refuse to do it. We fully accept that



we will be having kids that are unfunded, but the reality is there are some kids that will drop out, so it is swings and roundabouts. We are covered, but not all of them. Last year, of the 42, I think only about 28 of them were actually funded. It is almost a civic obligation that we find we have to do.

**Mr ELASMAR**—Simon, why would the kids leave school and come to you? Is it something against the school? How is it they accept you and they do not accept school?

**Mr DWYER**—I wish I knew. I wish I had a standard answer, but I do not. I think it is a combination of things. It is a combination of our environment; that it is very open to them, very respectful for them. The one point I make to every single student that walks in our doors is, 'I demand respect for everybody in this room,' and once they understand that I will respect them as much as I expect them to respect any teacher, that sets a really good groundwork.

We let them do things that they probably would not be allowed to do in school, and they like that too. They like the idea of being treated as an adult even though they are still only kids. They have got friends there. A lot of their friends are coming to VCAL and they are seeing that they are enjoying it, that they are getting something positive out of it, so they will come along too. Families will say, 'Look, can my boy come?' I wish I knew the answer, but I do not. It has got to be something that we do, because it is working.

**Mr ELASMAR**—And it could be something the schools do.

**Mr DWYER**—The schools are not doing it, yes.

**The CHAIR**—I guess they do not fit into a class of 25, essentially, in terms of what is happening in that class and you can offer them a more individual pathway.

**Mr WRIGHT**—Often they are square pegs in round holes. They are.

**Mr DWYER**—Geoff, you were a teacher, weren't you?

**The CHAIR**—Yes.

**Mr DWYER**—So you probably understand.

**The CHAIR**—You have got a few chalkies around the table here.

**Mr DWYER**—You get it, then. You get where we come from.

**The CHAIR**—I think we all were.

**Mr HERBERT**—Gentlemen, just on that point, I have a Community VCAL in my electorate in Eltham, and what seems to happen is that kids drop out of school halfway through a year, stay out, their mates are all around over the school holidays, their mates go back to school, and then they go and join a Community VCAL sometimes. What some of the kids have said to me is that once they have dropped out of the school they find it very difficult to go back into that school because they have kind of got a reputation and they feel the teachers do not want them back et cetera. Do you find that? Is that an issue in terms of why they would go to VCAL rather than go back to a school?

**Ms CAIRNS**—Part of my personal reasons for leaving school and then being able to join Community VCAL was that problems at home were causing me problems at school, which I would end up getting in trouble for. I felt that I should not be getting in trouble for things like uniforms, fees, days off that I could not account for due to problems at home. With Community VCAL there is sort of more leniency. You are not going to get a suspension or something like that if you have missed a day; you are just going to be helped to catch back up. For kids like myself, from my home life especially, it is very hard to be in trouble at school and then to deal with your problems at home, whereas with Community VCAL, I feel that I am sort of not getting away from it but being able to continue my education and then deal with my home problems or expenses, things like that. Fitting in was not really the thing that bothered me at all.

**Mr HALL**—Are you enjoying it, by the way?

**Ms CAIRNS**—Yes, I am enjoying it.

**Mr HERBERT**—On the resources issue, we heard in the previous inquiry that things like doing maths was crucial to get some apprenticeships in the trades et cetera. I guess you have a lot of students that have very varied education or attainment levels and you would have a different range of job aspirations. Given your limited resources, how do you tailor the education that each student needs to reach their goal, the pathway they want?

**Mr DWYER**—One of the benefits of VCAL now is that so many businesses, so many departments, are actually providing VCAL-structured packages. For instance, the department of consumer affairs have got a really good one, and TAC, and RACV. Places like that have courses that are specifically designed for VCAL. We can access those on the internet and all share them as resources. The thing about VCAL is that technically you cannot fail. If you do the work then you will pass, which makes it a little bit unambiguous about what level education they can get. With that in mind, we have got sufficient teachers so that our class sizes are down around between 12 and 15 and we can split up in those sorts of groups, so we can tailor what we do specifically to meet certain kids' opportunities. It is not like they are in a class of 25, where they would be the kids down the back who do not get it, who are mucking around, and they end up with me. We are able to take those kids and say, 'Well, what do you need?' or 'What's your weakness?' and sit down one on one at times and actually help them.

**Mr HALL**—How can you afford to run class sizes of between 12 and 15?

**Mr WRIGHT**—Good question. We do. VCAL is made up of three levels: foundation, intermediate and senior. We try and keep those classes fairly distinct because of the way that it is set up. We have more than 15 students at each site. At the moment we have about 30 at each site, at Rosebud and at Hastings, and that number requires two teachers. Irrespective of how many students show up on any given day, we have two teachers there because of that number, 30. It would be too difficult to ask one teacher to look after 30 VCAL kids without that rigid structure that the school may be able to provide. On our structure, 15 kids is a handful; 30 kids is a nightmare.

**Mr HALL**—I admire you. You are doing a good job.

**Mr DWYER**—I had 28 in a class at one stage last year, and it was like a Barnum and Bailey circus.

**Mr WRIGHT**—The two big issues I see are (1) the younger age kids who are dropping out of school or not being serviced properly and (2) that any student who enrolls with us after 28 April—after the census day—is unfunded. My opinion is that that census day, which is currently 28 April, should be extended out to about September and any student that drops out of school still has a bucket of money with them to go into a Community VCAL.

**Mr DIXON**—Because that is when they drop out of school.

**Mr WRIGHT**—We cannot get money from the school on a pro rata basis because their global budget has already been budgeted for.

**Mr DIXON**—Yes.

**Mr WRIGHT**—So if a student drops out of school halfway through the year, it is very difficult—and I understand how difficult it is—for the school to part with half of the entitlement that they had at the start of the year. That has already been budgeted for. There needs to be extra funding, which flies in the face of school retention rates and all that sort of stuff, but at least that student, with that little bit of extra funding, is not dropping out and is still being connected and the retention rate is still there.

**The CHAIR**—Thank you very much. It has been very good to have that input from you and to gain a

better understanding of the new VCAL. Well done!

**Mr WRIGHT**—Thank you for your time.

**Witnesses withdrew.**

**Hearing suspended.**



# CORRECTED VERSION

## EDUCATION AND TRAINING COMMITTEE

### **Inquiry into geographical differences in the rate in which Victorian students participate in higher education**

Rosebud—12 May 2008

#### Members

Mr M. Dixon

Mr N. Elasmar

Mr P. Hall

Dr A Harkness

Mr S. Herbert

Mr G. Howard

Mr N. Kotsiras

Chair: Mr G. Howard

Deputy Chair: Mr N. Kotsiras

#### Staff

Executive Officer: Ms K. Ellingford

Research Officers: Ms C. Whiteman and Ms J. Hope

Administrative Officer: Ms N. Tyler

#### Witnesses

Ms P. O'Connell, Executive Officer, and

Mr R. Butler, Chair, Frankston Mornington Peninsula LLEN; Area General Manager, Telstra.

**The CHAIR**—Richard and Pat, welcome, as representatives from Frankston Mornington Peninsula LLEN. You are clearly aware of what our inquiry has been looking into in regard to students going on to higher education from the region. We are looking forward to your input and, after you make your presentation, asking some questions of you.

**Ms O'CONNELL**—I did a PowerPoint, and I photocopied it, but unfortunately I do not have enough copies to hand out. I will make sure you get one afterwards.

**The CHAIR**—Okay.

**Mr BUTLER**—I am going to set some context. Thank you for inviting us and for having us here today. I am the chair of the Frankston and Mornington Peninsula Local Learning and Employment Network. I have come to value the strengths of the peninsula community in the five years that I have been involved with the LLEN. I am sure you are all acutely aware of the role of the LLEN. Its network on the peninsula extends to over 400 members, each with substantial numbers of employees and students, and its role is to bring those together in an effective manner.

Young people feel connected to this area, and that is very strongly evidenced in surveys, such as Communities That Care, that are done by Mornington Peninsula Shire. It is a wonderful place to live and it is a great place to bring up children. It is definitely not a metropolitan area of Melbourne. In my other role as general manager of Telstra, I get berated because of the STD issues that exist here, but if one is at Rye or Sorrento or Flinders at the moment, it clearly in my view has got nothing to do with metropolitan Melbourne, which starts somewhere else.

For a majority of young people living in Rosebud, Red Hill, Cape Schanck, Dromana and Western Port, as well as Mornington, moving to university means leaving home at a time when all indications are that young people need to stay, and are staying, at home longer and longer because of a financial imperative. But I do not think it is only a financial imperative that keeps young people at home. Our development is extending, and what certainly were once the teenage years extend in many cases into people's early 20s. As the father of young people just on the cusp of this particular age bracket, I am sure that those theories and observations by experts are correct.

Those young people will have a limited range of courses to choose from at Monash Peninsula, which is based in Frankston. That university has a number of distinct challenges that are presented to young people from this area. In particular, the demand on that university is so great that it has one of the highest entry scores in the state. If you choose to go there, not only are you competing with people within this area for a place but you are also competing with many people from outside the area who want to come here and study.

We can inspire young people to aim for tertiary education, but government policy needs to match the reality of what it means for parents in Rosebud West or Rye to support young people to attend university locally. Before this session convened, we were talking about a young person who lives on the peninsula but was studying in Warrnambool for a period of 12 months. Their first outside family life experience was of not only the challenges of a new educational institution and all that that represents but also the massive tyranny of distance. The challenges that they had at the end of the 12 months made it almost impossible for them to continue on. I think at that stage the accommodation was \$8,000 a year, and that gave them three meals a week as well as a bed, so they came back lean, fit and healthy.

We have quite a fantastic telecommunications and communication infrastructure on the peninsula, but the challenges around physical infrastructure and the challenges facing students are such that, if you are in this area and you study at Monash or at Berwick, you have far more than 90 or 100 minutes to travel, and public transport is also extremely sparse.

Having set that up, I would like to introduce Pat, who is going to take you through our presentation. If Paul Di-Masi does not make this meeting, we will try and anticipate what he would have said, based on our experience, as well.

**Ms O'CONNELL**—I am going to take you through a few key stats about the area. Thirty-two per

cent of 2006 school leavers were at university, which compares to a state figure of 47.4 per cent. In 2003, 29.4 per cent were enrolled at university, so we have actually had some growth. It has gone from 29.4 to 32.6 per cent in the last four years. At that point the Victorian figure was still 41.6 per cent, so we are still well down on that. In 2007, 22.3 per cent of year 12 completers received no offer of a tertiary place, compared to 21.6 per cent statewide—not a very big difference, but this 'no offer' thing is a big concern. At the same time, we have had an enormous growth in programs other than VCE, so our Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning, including Community VCAL provision, grew by 45 per cent from 2006 to 2007.

Our students also are more likely to go into apprenticeships and traineeships, the Victorian state figures would show, so 6.6 per cent of our kids go into apprenticeships compared to about 4.5 per cent in Victoria; 4.2 per cent go into traineeships, compared to about 3.6 per cent in Victoria. Are you starting to see a bit of picture here? We are not going to tertiary education at the same rates as other parts of Victoria. We are more inclined to vocational education, but still not at high enough rates to fill that big gap between tertiary education and doing virtually no further education or training.

Employment in our region is also very different from Victoria. 7.8 per cent of our school leavers will go directly into full-time employment, and this compares to about 5.9 per cent in Victoria, and part-time work—and this is a problematic area—is a destination for 13.2 per cent of our school leavers, compared to 7.7 per cent in Victoria. That does not include young people just going into part-time work as a deferral situation, so then going on to university or whatever; that is young people who actually see part-time work as the start of their pathway to employment in Victoria. It is a big worry, because every bit of information that I have seen says that those young people will be our long-term unemployed. In about three to five years time, when youth wages stop and they become adults in the workforce, what happens generally is that there will be a decline in the number of shifts per week they are offered, until they just disappear out of the face of work. So we have actually identified part-time work as a critical area that we need to be doing some work around.

When we looked at what young people in On Track said about what prevented them from or what provided a barrier to them applying for tertiary education, close to 40 per cent indicated the amount of travel would be prohibitive. In other words, to access the course they wanted to access, the amount of travel was just out of the question. It was in excess of an hour and a half each trip. Over 30 per cent indicated that the issue of leaving home was a key reason for not continuing. To access any of the low ENTER score universities, you really need to leave home here. If you want to go to VUT, you cannot do that trip satisfactorily from Rosebud on a daily basis, and I do not think part-time enrolments have ever worked very successfully for young people.

If you look at the socioeconomics of this community, 57 per cent of the families in Frankston are in the lowest and medium lowest household quartile income groups. Mornington Peninsula has similar numbers and highly disadvantaged pockets of communities, and these pockets are generally in a situation where there are also poor public transport arrangements linking them to Frankston or back to Melbourne.

**Mr BUTLER**—In fact, the figure is 52 per cent of postcodes on the peninsula are currently either on or below the national standard for economic poverty, which is, I think—Joe will know the definition—\$20 discretionary income at the end of each month after all expenses are paid.

**Ms O'CONNELL**—That is really the bulk of the statistics we wanted to present. I think it gives you a fairly good picture of what the place looks like and what young people themselves are saying about why they do not go on to university. We also have a population make-up that is very different from the rest of Victoria, being a community where roughly 12 per cent of the population is overseas born, but, of those 12 per cent, the vast majority are born either in English-speaking countries such as the UK or in middle Europe—so Germany, the Netherlands and so on.

We understand, looking at information from Melbourne University's youth surveys, that one of the most difficult population groups to deal with is our population. I think in today's *Age* there is an article about why young people do not complete schooling and, among other things, they identify some key factors, one of which is 'Australian born'. Our population is Australian born, often with British heritage—people who came here, I guess, with a set of notions about authority, education and so on that we still feel the impact of in the second and third generations of those families.

What are we suggesting you do about all this? We have a list of recommendations, including more research about what it is that forms this aspiration for higher education. We still do not know if it is just something in the water here or whether there is some meat that we could put on the bones of this population, to look at what it is that we need to be doing to help these young people build their aspirations. We need, very definitely, to inform parents better about the outcomes for young people in part-time work. I think there is still a belief that any employment is okay and that young people leaving school and getting a job means that their future is somehow secured. The evidence does not point in that direction any more. It may have 10 years ago or 20 years ago, but it does not any more.

We need to familiarise young people with higher education as a routine part of what they do in school. At the moment we are doing it as an add-on. We are not necessarily creating the pathway for young people into higher education from grade prep onwards. We are adding it in at about year 10, year 11, year 12, when a lot of young people have already formed their opinions about who they are, what they can do and where they see themselves going. I think we need to start a whole lot earlier, and we have started discussions with Monash on just that.

Of course, there are issues around affordable transport and accommodation for students who do have to travel or to relocate for tertiary education. I do not think that we can continue to add that to what parents in regional areas contribute to their young people in education. If we really want them to be educated, there has to be some recognition that in various areas it costs more for that to happen.

We have also started discussions around developing some distance learning centres. It is okay to talk about correspondence and distance learning for adults. I think most adults can manage it and handle it quite well, and the University of New England would be a really good example of a university that has made its name with distance learning. But young people miss out on the social side of university life, they miss out on face to face contacts and all those sorts of things. Surely there is a way that we could look at universities bringing those things into communities—well-equipped communities with schools and other infrastructure—on some sort of a temporary or part-time arrangement, rather than setting up a new campus in every area. Areas that do this quite well are places like Mildura, where La Trobe University is located in the TAFE college; there is sharing of staff and other arrangements that happen in that situation. Young people can do a first year and then go on to Bendigo to do second and third year, after having nurturing and help through that first year.

I would envisage centres where Deakin, VUT, La Trobe might share the one premises and between them provide the support for young people who then go online to do their study. The buildings that we would use? We have schools here that are not used 24 hours a day, seven days a week. We have community resources through council and so on. Why aren't we thinking about how we do this mix better? How do we make it place based? It does not have to be that VUT gets every student who does not go to Monash: it may be that Monash and VUT can form some sort of a deal around their low ENTER score students and so on and offer some of these pathways. That is, in a nutshell, what we have been thinking about and, if Paul was here, we would move into South East LLEN's presentation, but I think we might leave that.

**The CHAIR**—We could go on to questions first and then see where we are going. There may be some other things that you thought South East LLEN might offer.

**Mr HALL**—Richard and Pat, thank you for your presentation. I was interested in your recommendation about developing distant learning centres. Perhaps, Richard, with your Telstra background, is there an infrastructure issue? Firstly, is online learning popular among school leavers? Secondly, is there an issue with infrastructure availability, like broadband width capability, that people might not have at home to participate in online learning?

**Mr BUTLER**—That is a good question. I can answer partly anecdotally and partly fact based. My anecdotal answer is to address the first part of your question which is: how many people find online learning popular? Professor Phillip Steele indicated to me a week ago over a cup of coffee that some Asian students have places at Berwick but rarely attend any of the classes because of their ability to access them from their city based apartments and wherever they are living in the city of Melbourne. They have noted that attendances are well down across the Asian community because of the broader acceptance of online learning there. I cannot give you a more accurate answer. It is not an area that I have specifically looked at, but certainly we



would have that information.

Infrastructure here is comparable to infrastructure in any other regional part of Australia or outer metro part of Australia. That means that there is no fibre-optic cable that delivers broadband to any residents other than Martha Cove, and there are unlikely to be many students living in that place, with blocks of land starting at around \$1 million each. So that tends to be a destination for people rather than a place of progress. ADSL is available for all but about 250 households on the peninsula. Wireless broadband, which has traditionally been expensive but where prices are reducing, is also available to around all but 15 to 20 households on the peninsula. There is a price perception around non-wired broadband—wireless broadband—that immediately says that it is significantly out of the question. I think for a student that is a relevant observation when there is a point of comparison. ADSL is available, for the first 12 months with Telstra, at around 15 or so dollars a month and then goes to 30 or so dollars a month. That has a capacity or a content limitation at that price, but progressive capacities are available at slightly higher prices. Wireless broadband is slightly more expensive. So I have gone a long way around answering your question. The key points are that it is comparable with anywhere else, it is available but at a price, and those things represent barriers.

**Mr HALL**—Which might be overcome with a distance learning centre.

**Ms O'CONNELL**—It might be, because it would not be reliant on the student meeting all those costs at their home base, and it may be that what you need is a whole package that looks at the costs for things like wireless broadband and subsidises those, because we are not going to be subsidising their transport or their accommodation. It is just another way of packaging these things up. The idea of having a centre is to cover young people being able to do things outside of doing them all by themselves at home, which I think is really not the go for most young people.

**Mr HALL**—Yes. It is a significant social issue.

**Ms O'CONNELL**—Yes.

**Mr HALL**—So there are both social and capital issues.

**Ms O'CONNELL**—Yes.

**Mr HERBERT**—I want to pick up on that point. Most of what I have read indicates that, in terms of online difficulties, online technology or videoconference, for instance, is a good supplement.

**Ms O'CONNELL**—Yes.

**Mr HERBERT**—But if that is all there is, it is not a particularly good form of getting an undergraduate qualification.

**Ms O'CONNELL**—No.

**Ms HERBERT**—In fact, a lot of kids find it very difficult because it is so limiting.

**Ms O'CONNELL**—The idea, from my mind, is to take some of the best bits from the organisations which have done distance learning well, like the University of New England where people attend the campus half a dozen times a year. You have your own tutor appointed to you by the university so you are developing a more personal relationship. You are coming to a centre where there are other young people doing the same sorts of online courses. You are sharing information and working together. You may have visiting tutors or whatever. It is taking the bits of distance learning that make place based okay and then adding some ingredients into it to make it better for young people doing it for the first time; to build their capacity to go on and complete the whole degree online or go off to university in their second year. It would, by necessity probably, be restricted to certain subjects or certain degree areas and, again, you would look at the history of the organisations who do this well—how they select the subjects that young people do successfully online and the subjects they need to do in a group—and then frame the year's work around that, rather than this thing of being up at Footscray at nine o'clock Monday morning.

**Mr BUTLER**—If you were able to reduce, as an outcome, travel by 50 per cent, that would be a substantial improvement.

**Mr HERBERT**—So fifty-fifty, depending on the course. You were talking about some courses being more suitable than others.

**Ms O'CONNELL**—Yes.

**Mr HERBERT**—Do you know what sorts of courses?

**Ms O'CONNELL**—If I looked at New England's it would be all the things around probably the general arts subjects.

**Mr BUTLER**—Business.

**Ms O'CONNELL**—Business.

**Mr BUTLER**—Commerce.

**Ms O'CONNELL**—And commerce and that sort of area. I think you would have difficulties tackling a lot of the science areas, but you may be able to do individual subjects and so on. So you could get this mix happening.

**Mr BUTLER**—I am sure we are not going to immediately act on these answers, but I think it is a question of looking at what kind of learning is required and what can effectively be done in an online environment, as opposed to what specific subject.

**Ms O'CONNELL**—Yes.

**Mr BUTLER**—So I agree certainly with what Pat said; but also to the style. We have, again, from my own personal experience, 300 courses available to us as part of my executive requirements at Telstra. Some of them I read and then speak to someone about, others I do completely in isolation, and they are as diverse as can be. I think it is a question of what works best for what course.

**Ms O'CONNELL**—Looking at the deferment rates in our area, which are going up steadily each year—young people are deferring first year.

**Mr DIXON**—What are the deferment rates at the moment, Pat? Do you know?

**Ms O'CONNELL**—I think around 12 per cent. That has risen by two per cent in the last year. If we looked at, also within this setting, somehow providing for those young people who want to get on to youth allowance—and a significant number of these young people deferring will be doing it for that very purpose; we lose them in that year—we could start to tie them in by offering something part time or whatever, keeping them attached to learning during that year, and not at a cost that currently blows them away.

**Mr HALL**—I notice that Paul in his submission mentions formalising a gap year for year 12s.

**Ms O'CONNELL**—Yes.

**Mr HALL**—That sort of goes against what you are suggesting, too; that sometimes with a gap year you lose the kids, don't you?

**Ms O'CONNELL**—You do. If you look at the reasons why young people are taking a gap year, it is for a range of reasons, No. 1 being, 'Had enough of study for the time being,' moving through to, 'In order to qualify for youth allowance'.

**Mr BUTLER**—Financial, yes.

**Ms O'CONNELL**—Either to earn money or to qualify for youth allowance. So how many of those young people we lose, I am not really sure. I cannot speak on those numbers because we do not track past the deferment, but if you were talking about formalising a gap year, rather than formalising it maybe informalising it by adding in the ability to do some part of your next year's study without doing it all, and universities seem very reluctant to offer any sort of part-time arrangement. It is either full time or nothing.

**Mr BUTLER**—A gap year is an awful long time for a post year-12 student. It is more than eight but less than 10 per cent of their life. Maybe 7½ per cent of their lifetime is in that 12 months, approximately. So it is very easy to start out as a post year-12 student with the best intentions of taking a year off, and it is easy to be distracted by part-time work in that very long period of time.

**Mr HALL**—You are probably arguing in support of a structured gap year—has some merit—as proposed by Paul in his submission.

**Ms O'CONNELL**—It has some merit. I would not like to see it disqualifying young people from getting the youth allowance, because we have created this ridiculous system where you have to take 12 months off to demonstrate you need the money. I do not want to disqualify any young person who actually has the nous to use the system.

**The CHAIR**—So it is doing it for the right reason, not for financial reasons.

**Ms O'CONNELL**—Yes.

**The CHAIR**—In regard to the comments you are making about the students leaving school to go onto part-time work and that there needs to be more advice given to parents, I am a bit stunned. It is a bit of an indictment on schools, I would have thought, that that sort of thing is happening. Have you had discussions with schools to see why that is happening and what they are doing to try and stop it?

**Ms O'CONNELL**—Yes, we have. What can you do to try and stop a young person who has completed year 12 from choosing a pathway outside your school? Realistically, your job in getting them to complete year 12 is meeting the mandate that the government has set for you, which is completion of year 12 or its equivalent. You can advise them very strongly on the outcomes, but I think if families are convinced that any job is a good job, you are really up against it inside a school trying to advise them otherwise.

**The CHAIR**—But I would have thought the families are still pretty reluctant about that.

**Mr BUTLER**—No.

**The CHAIR**—Kids going off to do part-time work.

**Ms O'CONNELL**—No.

**The CHAIR**—I thought they would have understood that it is just a last-ditch effort and they cannot see anything else either.

**Mr BUTLER**—I think you are right in some cases, but our experience of some of the family backgrounds here is that there can be multi-generational unemployment. So a person that gets to year 12 and then decides to get a part-time job may not have the leadership inherent in the family group to encourage them to go back in.

**Ms O'CONNELL**—The other thing is that the vast majority of available work here is part-time work, because of this community and the way it is dependent on areas like retail, hospitality and tourism.

**Mr BUTLER**—Thirty per cent of the rates of pay in the Mornington shire are from addresses that are outside the Mornington shire.

**Mr HALL**—Some of the research that we have seen is that the single biggest correlation between kids going on to higher education and other matters is the educational level of their parents, their family.

**Ms O'CONNELL**—Yes.

**Mr HALL**—Would that be true of the Mornington Peninsula?

**Ms O'CONNELL**—Yes, absolutely.

**Mr BUTLER**—Yes, absolutely.

**The CHAIR**—I am looking at the time and we have moved past our time allocation, even without Paul. That has been very helpful to us. There are obviously a lot of issues that we will look to follow up in terms of your submission, too. So thank you very much for your presentation.

**Ms O'CONNELL**—Thank you.

**The CHAIR**—Thanks, Richard. Thanks, Pat.

**Mr BUTLER**—I would like to make a couple of points to close.

**The CHAIR**—Sure.

**Mr BUTLER**—They are certainly made informally. I am also on the executive of South East Networks, which is a federally funded group whose purpose it is to research and understand the south-east region and to stimulate employment and business through grants and through other promotional activities. Recent research has shown that the south-east corridor—I am sure you are aware of this—is growing at a rate that far exceeds Frankston and the Mornington Peninsula. In fact, the term being used is that 'Frankston is the point at which the landlock starts.' Canbourne, further east in the south-east region, is growing, and I think over 25,000 young people moved there last year. On the peninsula there is a decline.

So one of the longer term challenges will be how that gets managed and how someone in this area—or at Flinders or Sorrento or the other places that we have mentioned—deals with this area perhaps going into almost negative growth—which is one of the forecasts—and, in particular, the challenges that a young person finishing at Rosebud Secondary is going to face. If they have to travel to the nearest university it may very well be Berwick or perhaps even Oakleigh or some of the other regions. This is not something that we will fix in a short period of time. Thank you for having us both.

**The CHAIR**—Thank you, Richard. Thanks, Pat.

**Ms O'CONNELL**—Thank you.

**Witnesses withdrew.**

# CORRECTED VERSION

## EDUCATION AND TRAINING COMMITTEE

### **Inquiry into geographical differences in the rate in which Victorian students participate in higher education**

Rosebud—12 May 2008

#### Members

Mr M. Dixon	Mr S. Herbert
Mr N. Elasmar	Mr G. Howard
Mr P. Hall	Mr N. Kotsiras
Dr A Harkness	

Chair: Mr G. Howard

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Executive Officer: Ms K. Ellingford

Research Officers: Ms C. Whiteman and Ms J. Hope

Administrative Officer: Ms N. Tyler

#### Witnesses

Mr M. Keates, President and Student, Business and Economics,

Ms C. Alpey, Student, Paramedics,

Ms E. Pongrac, Student, Business and Economics,

Mr A. Gray, Student, Business and Economics,

Ms T. Trickey, Student, Nursing,

Ms C. Heath, Student, Occupational Therapy,

Ms Z. Francis, Student, Occupational Therapy, and

Ms D. Van Der Wath, Student, Paramedics, MonSU Peninsula.

**The CHAIR**—Next we are going to hear from the Monash University Student Union. Thank you. You have come out in force today, which is terrific. We are pleased to meet with you and hear your contribution in terms of your suggestions and your experiences in regard to regional students going on to higher education. I do not know who is speaking first but, as we have said, if you can mention your name before you speak so that it can be noted in the recorded commentary.

**Mr KEATES**—My name is Mathew Keates. I have a submission here which I will read.

**The CHAIR**—You will not need to read through it in total, just the gist of it.

**Mr KEATES**—Our report will provide an insight into what factors are taken into account when making a decision on whether or not to undertake higher education, by regional students, and the effects on participation rates. We will also look at the difficulties that are faced when trying to access higher education. Key factors that are taken into account in our report are transport, availability of the courses that are offered, alternative avenues into higher education, and financial support.

**Ms ALPHEY**—My name is Cara Alpey. When we examined the questions that were provided to us on which to base our report, in terms of different geographic locations and if students are more or less likely to apply for university, we found that, particularly for the peninsula, if a student was considering a local education at the Monash campus, it is difficult for students due to the specificity of courses that are offered. The campus is predominantly a health science based campus and, whilst there are business and economics subjects at the campus, they are being relocated to city campuses and also to Berwick, which makes it difficult for students such as those from Rosebud to attend a university in their region.

I will read out a statistic: according to Professor Rob Willis, who is the academic director for Clayton and Caulfield, only two per cent of the students that are enrolled at Peninsula campus alone are from the region. But I guess this statistic is skewed because a lot of students from wider metropolitan Melbourne and rural Australia do relocate to Frankston in order to undertake a degree at Monash in the peninsula. We do believe as well that the location of the campus does attract a lot of students from wider areas, so it might not be so difficult. Due to public transport, it does impose difficulties for students as was mentioned in the previous presentation. Transport is a significant problem for students that want to attend university, particularly in this region. Public transport directly to the campus is currently unavailable. A lot of students have to travel from significant distances because they simply cannot afford residential accommodation.

In regard to whether they are more or less likely to receive or accept university offers, we believe that students on the peninsula do have restricted opportunities to receive tertiary offers. As was previously mentioned, the socioeconomic status of families on the peninsula is significantly lower than that of metropolitan Melbourne. Also, a lot of students do accept offers from other campuses because they offer a wider breadth of courses. Monash is attempting to tackle this. One structure that could be implemented is the transition and pathways program. This program serves to tackle high achievers in the region, so students that do not receive the ENTER that is required for admission into a course at Monash can undertake a short course at Monash, a diploma, or they facilitate their education with Chisholm and therefore they are often able to achieve second-year entry or accelerated entry into a course that they wish to undertake.

In conjunction with this, we found that there is a lack of career advice for a lot of students on the peninsula. There is a lot of focus in particular schools on ENTER score and, if that is not achievable, then students will not be able to gain tertiary admission. We think that there should be a greater emphasis on alternative pathways; for example, undertaking a diploma or a TAFE course and how this can be a practical means to facilitate entry into a tertiary study program.

**Mr KEATES**—We have also tried to answer whether students are more or less likely to complete a university course once they enrol. We have found that at Peninsula, there is a 78 per cent retention rate for students who commence a year of study. The recent Monash experience questionnaire conducted across all of the Monash campuses indicated that this figure has definitely improved significantly over the past three to four years at Peninsula specifically, as students on this campus are, as a whole, the most satisfied with their educational experience.

However, we have found that there is a noticeable lack of retention particularly in the nursing school, which is considerably below the average. There are various external reasons for this, such as the high percentage of mature age students that attend Peninsula and specifically the nursing course; recent implementation of VSU causing the year-long closure of child cares on campus and the lack of availability of enough room for mature age students to place their children in child care while they are attending class. We have found that students that enrol in a course after completing alternative pathways are more likely to go on and complete their course. They have already taken their year or two at TAFE or gone through Monash College and gone through the transitional program and are already dedicated and have a will to succeed and finish a university course.

A lot of students have had to leave home and relocate to Frankston. We have found that a lot of the students at the Peninsula campus are not local students but from far away or considerable distances. They have had to relocate to the local community. Juggling part-time jobs and full-time study can make it very difficult. When trying to support themselves while they are away from home they obviously have to pay rent, try to get accommodation on campus or somewhere in Frankston; that is quite difficult. The added burden at the Peninsula campus is that many students have to go on placement, whether it be teaching rounds or clinical placements, and this can often be up to three or four months, so at the same time as they are paying rent for their accommodation to attend studies at university, they are also paying for accommodation while they are away, which is very difficult. We find that it would be less likely for those students to complete their university degree because of the financial constraints that are put upon them.

**Ms ALPHEY**—In terms of students from different geographic areas—if they stay at school; if they complete different subjects; choose different post-school pathways; have different courses available; economic, social and cultural issues—we spent time just thinking about this and examining it because there are significant factors in choosing tertiary study. For example, in areas that have a lower socioeconomic status—for example, Frankston—a lot of students do leave school at year 10 and go out into the workforce because of the economic constraints. University study is not cheap and, whilst there are a lot of the former HECS places available—CSP—it is still a significant cost to pay, so a lot of students find that they are unable to do so.

Using a bit of anecdotal evidence, we had a meeting with Professor Rob Willis two weeks ago now and he informed us that he was once at a school in Cranbourne doing an information session for the students so that they would be inclined to apply for Monash, and one of the students said to him, 'Well, I'm just from Cranbourne. How can I go to university?' I think a significant factor which needs to be addressed is that a lot of students from areas such as the peninsula believe that they do not have the capacity to go to university because they are not from the metropolitan area or because they just attend a public school, which is not the case at all.

In conjunction with that, a lot of students from the peninsula and the areas close by undertake more practical subjects and I think that, with the scaling and so forth that happens with VTAC admissions, their subjects do not really assist them to get the ENTERs that they need. They might do really well in hands-on subjects like woodwork or home economics but because that is not taken into account inhibits them from achieving these ENTERs.

We have already touched on Peninsula in particular being a health science based campus, and this may inhibit a lot of students from actually engaging in tertiary study. A lot of students do find it easier to live at home because they do not have to bear the financial burdens of rent and paying for their own food and so forth. However, if a student is not interested in undertaking a health science based degree, they have to travel further into the city, and, for a lot of students, on a daily basis this is not possible, particularly for people from Rosebud, Sorrento, Portsea. It could be a two-hour drive—even more—when you consider peak-hour traffic. It is just too difficult. And, as was mentioned in the previous presentation, online and part-time education really is not an option for a lot of universities, particularly at Monash. Monash prefer to have full-time study and full-time students.

Also, I think that facilities at different campuses do inhibit students from various cultural backgrounds. They are improving, but you do find that, for example, Muslim students, female students in particular, require their own place to pray, and they have to pray some four times a day. I am not an expert on the Muslim faith, but we do know from Alyce, who is our OSS—overseas student services—director at the Peninsula campus, that

when prayer facilities are not available the students are less inclined to come into university, to come to classes, and even to enrol, because their faith is obviously very important to them; so that is another thing that we perhaps need to consider when trying to tackle the issue of higher education in particular areas.

**Mr KEATES**—I am touching on skill shortages. We have found that students from different geographic locations who complete university degrees are definitely impacted upon, as they are more inclined to stay in their urban setting to start their career. For example, someone from the rural setting with a degree in business and commerce is less likely to get a job in their home community and will therefore venture out closer to the city where there are more opportunities and there is more incentive to begin a career. That is definitely a trend in business and commerce, especially accounting and finance. You will find that a lot of students are not taking those skills back to their community because there is less opportunity than there is in the city.

Also, students at Peninsula campus are spread throughout a wide range of geographical locations across Victoria, and even interstate, so, with most courses at the Peninsula campus being health science orientated and a lack of these courses at other campuses, it is uncertain whether or not these students are going back to their communities with these skills once they have completed their studies, and this then has an impact on the skill shortage in regional areas; therefore, there need to be more incentives and opportunities for these students to utilise the skills that they have learnt at university in their regional communities.

**Ms ALPHEY**—As students and student advocates on campus, we have based most of our presentation on anecdotal evidence. However, I believe that it is definitely evidence to consider, because we as student advocates have to listen to students about their issues, of course, so we do have a lot of insight into the issues that might impede enrolment of a student in a tertiary course.

There are different strategies that could be implemented to address these barriers for different geographic locations. One is definitely consideration of ENTER scores for rural centres and isolated centres, because the students on the peninsula particularly do not have the same access to schooling and so forth that other students do and perhaps might not be able to achieve the ENTERs that are required for a medicine degree or a law degree, whereas they may be perfectly capable of actually undertaking that course; it is just the ENTER which inhibits them from doing so.

I think pathway and transition programs, as well, are particularly significant: promoting to students that they actually can go and do a university degree and not to think, 'Well, I'm just from Cranbourne,' 'I'm just from Rosebud,' 'How can I go and do a university degree?' There needs to be, maybe in high school, a change in the mindset. I guess the social aspects do impact, where students get together with their friends and think, 'Oh, yeah. No, I can't go to uni,' so that by the time they get to year 12 they have lost interest in trying to achieve these ENTER scores, and perhaps we need to implement earlier education through the primary years to tell students about or to provide students with their options when they finish school.

Also, at the moment I know Monash are reviewing a transport strategy. This may facilitate more students actually coming and studying. Use of public transport: we are going to see if we can get the Stony Point line extended because the trains do run to the university campus but they are really infrequent. Use of car pooling and other things will give students alternative ways to get to the campus, as opposed to having to drive every day, with the cost of petrol and so forth increasing. That is pretty much what we have found. However, we are really happy to answer any questions if we have left anything out.

**The CHAIR**—How many of you are from the Peninsula campus? I do not know whether, Mathew and Cara, you are from—

**Ms ALPHEY**—We are all students at the Peninsula campus. However, we are not all from the peninsula. Dionne is from New South Wales—

**The CHAIR**—I was going to suggest that we go along the line and hear from each of you individually, just quickly: what you are studying, where you came from and why you have come to Peninsula.

**Mr GRAY**—My name is Adrian Gray. I went to school at Peninsula and did VCE there. Then I



travelled overseas for a year. Then I studied at Bond University for a year of a law degree. I was not really happy doing that, so I came out of that and then started an apprenticeship, did a whole lot of other jobs, worked in a factory, travelled around a bit, and then I worked in the casino for 10 months as a roulette dealer. I had a lot of fun there; I was exposed to a lot of creepy, funny, quirky things—all sorts of things—there. Then decided that was not for me—'I think it's time to come back and finish a degree'—so I enrolled in business and commerce at Monash University. I am a second-year student there, majoring in international business and accounting, and I am planning to travel overseas next year and do a semester, probably in England somewhere.

**Ms VAN DER WATH**—I am Dionne Van Der Wath. I have travelled around a lot with my family. Dad has worked and moved around a lot. We have lived in different countries and states—Victoria and New South Wales—and I moved down here because I study paramedics, Bachelor of Emergency Health, and the course was offered either at the Charles Sturt University or I had to wait till I was 21 to join through the government system. I did not want to wait around and waffle too much with my life so I chose to go to university. I actually took a gap year, and it was Charles Sturt or Monash who offered the degree at the time that I applied, so I applied in both and Monash had the better prospects, I guess, or they seemed to have the better course; so, if I got in there, I chose to go there. Also, Charles Sturt was quite rural, and either way I was going to have to move out of home. It was five hours or a different state, and Melbourne just seemed to have the better facilities with transport because it was closer to metropolitan. I am an environmental officer. I am also on the residence at campus, so I am also in contact with a lot of people who are in the same situation and have had to move states to study or move from rural, the country. There are a lot of people from two hours, three hours away. So if you have any questions about residency, please ask.

**Ms ALPHEY**—My name is Cara Alphey. I am a second-year student. I am studying emergency health as well—paramedic degree. I actually deferred after I finished high school. I went overseas for a year—took a gap year. I chose Monash for similar reasons to Dee: the course that was offered was the course that I wanted to do and it did seem the better degree. They also offer the degree at Victoria University but I had heard that the Monash degree was good. In contrast to Dee, I actually had to move. I am originally from Bacchus Marsh, which is up near Ballarat, so I had to relocate to Frankston, but I do not live on res. I have my own accommodation, and rent, which I pay. So I have that different experience.

**Mr KEATES**—My name is Mathew Keates. I have just completed a bachelor degree in business and commerce, studying accounting and finance. I did accounting at Peninsula campus and finance at the Caulfield campus. I had to go through TAFE because my ENTER score was terrible. So I took a year doing TAFE. It was a pathway to Monash University. I didn't actually realise until I was there that it was something I always wanted to do: complete a university degree, majoring in accounting and finance. I found that out at TAFE, which was great. I worked really hard and ended up getting into university. Obviously I had to get decent results, but I think if that was more heavily promoted I would have a lot more friends from high school, that also got really bad ENTER scores, going through those pathways and entering university.

**Mr HALL**—Where was your high school, Mathew?

**Mr KEATES**—Cranbourne, at St Peter's College.

**Ms FRANCIS**—My name is Zoe Francis. I originally lived in Murrumbidgee and went to high school at Star of the Sea in Brighton. I am doing occupational therapy and I originally got a first-round offer in Geelong, but that was obviously a very big travel issue—I would have had to move—and I got a third-round offer to Frankston. So that was obviously a bit closer. But I have lived in Frankston for a couple of years and now I am in Cranbourne.

**Ms TRICKEY**—My name is Tara Trickey. I am a first-year nursing student. I went to school at Kilbreda College in Mentone, so I used to commute from the Frankston line each day for 45 minutes up there and back. I took a year off. I went and did some volunteer teaching in Poland and backpacked for the rest of the year, for my first year. I then commenced a Bachelor of Health Science at Monash and then found that was not practical enough for me, so I transferred into nursing this year. So I am a first-year nursing student and I was appointed the education and welfare officer on the MonSU board. I still live at home. I live in Moorooduc.

**Ms HEATH**—My name is Claire Heath. I am also doing occupational therapy. I am a third year. I went straight from school to occupational therapy, and I also got accepted into Geelong first but chose to come to Frankston, also for travel issues and because it has got a very community orientated focus in the course here. I am the general representative on MonSU Peninsula.

**The CHAIR**—Where are you living?

**Ms HEATH**—In Hampton—Clayton now, but I was in Hampton.

**Ms PONGRAC**—My name is Elise. I am originally from Singapore. My mum is Singaporean and my dad is Australian. They are both still in Singapore. I did my Monash degree at first long distance whilst I was in Singapore, but that was shocking because the centre in Singapore was terrible. The people there did not run it very well. So I got fed up after a while, since I was not getting good grades, and I said, 'Look, I'm wasting my money.' So I inquired about transferring to on-campus, and I chose Peninsula because it is closest to the beach and I like the beach. But when I found myself in the Peninsula it is very different from Singapore. Firstly, transport drove me mad. I think it was a month and a half before I said, 'Okay, mum, send me my savings. I'm buying a car. I cannot take the bus any more.' I spend three hours getting somewhere to go grocery shopping or something.

I am doing a business degree, majoring in human resource management, with a minor in psychology. I am also the overseas student services director. So I deal with all the international students and I get a lot of complaints about transport and lots of interesting views on studying in Victoria and away from home. That is about it.

**The CHAIR**—How many of you do have your own cars? Everybody. So that is what makes it work. You have escaped the public transport issue.

**Ms TRICKEY**—It takes 45 minutes to walk to a station or bus stop.

**Ms PONGRAC**—We have got the Leawarra station right near our campus. That is the Stony Point one. It used to come every two hours. Now it is every hour. But if it is just past—

**Ms TRICKEY**—When you miss it.

**Ms PONGRAC**—At night the train is either 8.15 or 9.15 and you have to take the 8.15 one, and walking to the Frankston station is not always that safe. I had an international student a few weeks ago who got assaulted by some drunk Frankston girl. She got bruised, internal injuries and her clothes were all wrecked. So it is not the safest walk.

**Ms ALPHEY**—Whilst we all have cars, I know a lot of other students that do not have cars and live a considerable distance from the campus who do use public transport, which is why, as we mentioned, Monash are looking at a transport strategy; working on establishing safer walking tracks and services direct to the campus.

**Mr GRAY**—I live in Mount Eliza, which is the next suburb over from Frankston, and in the morning I run from my house along the foreshore there and into the campus, which is under an hour, and that bypasses all the transport issues. You are straight into uni and I do not have to worry about anything.

**The DEPUTY CHAIR**—When you were in high school or secondary school how much career advice did you receive? Was it worthwhile, or was there no career advice? Did you know what you wanted to do after year 10, year 11, year 12? Did the school support you in deciding?

**Ms VAN DER WATH**—I think it is different for people who know what they want to do and people who do not know what they want to do. I always sort of knew I wanted to do paramedics. So for me it was choosing that, finding out the information and going for it. But I know friends who had no idea what they wanted to do. There was a support there but it only starts at the end of year 11, and sometimes that is a bit late

for people, because they have chosen the wrong subjects. So they will say, 'You should study general broader subjects,' and they go, 'I've already chosen. How do I change?' At my school, information came a bit late, and I think as Cara was saying before, information should be given earlier, especially with the emphasis on the workforce. I do not know if it is just me, but the view seems to be that the workforce is looking more towards people with degrees instead of general or life experience.

**Ms TRICKEY**—Even now some degrees do not even get you a job.

**Ms VAN DER WATH**—Yes, it needs to come through a bit earlier that it is an important aspect of students' lives. It was interesting, the presentation before, when you had people taking the gap years off to go for youth allowance. I know a lot of students who did not know about that so they found themselves in the boat where they do not qualify and their friends do. I know it is not really on that question.

**Ms ALPHEY**—I think geographic location does play a major role. For example, I went to school in Ballarat, which is a large regional centre, and I went to a private school. So we were pumped with information from year 7 whereas, as we mentioned before, a lot of students that attend a public school or are in a more remote place do not actually get that information. So I think it does play a significant role, because then the students, as Dee was saying, cannot choose the subjects, cannot progress.

**Ms TRICKEY**—What I found really good at my school—but it was a little bit late again—was that we used to have career speakers that would come through, and sometimes you did not really want to go to them. I remember having an Army lady that came through and she spoke about what she used to do, and by the end of it I was really fascinated with the job. But they really need to promote and make it compulsory for students to attend these sessions, because to see someone that has actually made it, instead of just reading about them in a book that someone could have made up, you actually have true evidence that someone can do it.

**Mr ELASMAR**—Apart from extra allowance and transport and all of this, you mentioned years 11 and 12 before, which is important. Students have that feeling from that area, 'Why should I go to university?' and things like that. Where do parents stand on this? Do parents support the students or are they against them?

**Ms ALPHEY**—I think it does vary, unfortunately, from family to family as well. I do not know if everybody else agrees with me, but you can take some parents that do not have the time to spend with their children to educate them about those types of things, or because they are under socioeconomic pressure have to encourage their children to go out and work, whereas students that come from a metropolitan background are more likely, I guess, to receive that education from their parents because their parents are more likely to be educated as well.

**Ms TRICKEY**—Even the background of them, if they are from overseas. My grandparents are Irish and what I have been told all my life is to get your ticket, get your degree and then you can go do what you want. So that has been emphasised in my family, but that is from my background. So it is also that focus.

**Ms PONGRAC**—A lot of my classmates in business are the first ones in their family to get into a degree, and their parents cannot afford to pay for the degree. So it is all on HECS, and then they are working two or three part-time jobs to cover their expenditures and stuff because their families are not well off at all, and they are the first ones going to university. I think they have got it really hard because their parents cannot help them with studies; cannot help them financially.

**The CHAIR**—That is encouraging.

**Mr HALL**—I have got one tough question for you and it is tough because not all of you live locally. Do you think that local students should get favoured treatment for entry into their local university campus, particularly because you said before, Cara, that if you live in Cranbourne or you live in Rosebud you do not go to uni? You said that people have poor aspirations.

**Ms ALPHEY**—That was a generalisation.

**Mr HALL**—But if you were given favoured treatment to get into uni, perhaps you might lift the aspirations of those kids. How important is it for kids along the Mornington Peninsula, Frankston area, to get favoured access into Monash?

**Mr GRAY**—I think it is very important, it really is. I come from a wealthy background and my parents paid for me to go and do a degree up there and I failed. I messed around and partied too much. Then my father said, 'If you want to go to university, you've got to go get a job and earn money to pay for that degree,' so I went out and worked in the casino, saved all the money, saved the 20 grand; went back to university. Now I am doing the degree off my own bat. I think you appreciate it a lot more that way. I did not go to a public school, so I would not know about that situation; but give them the idea that they can actually achieve that and build themselves up; they do not have to think that they will be a plumber like their old man, or a carpenter; they can be a doctor or a lawyer—anything.

**Mr HALL**—Dionne, you did not come from Victoria and therefore you chose this. How would you feel if somebody from Rosebud took your place and was chosen above you? Do you think that is fair?

**Ms VAN DER WATH**—I was going to mention that. I understand that New South Wales has a system where, if you live in the area, they will give you four more ENTER points to go to the local university. It did influence students from that community to go to that university, so that aspect worked because I had a lot of friends who chose to stay where we were because of it. Personally, I would feel that that would be unfair because if I really wanted to do that and it was not available in my community, I would have to move—I had to move down eventually or move out. I would feel that was unfair and probably have some resentment about it. If it is four points and I was two points shy, I would feel that the place was taken away from me.

**Mr GRAY**—I was sitting on a faculty board—the business and economics board—at Caulfield the other day. They were saying that they were disappointed that at that campus in Caulfield there were not enough Australian students represented; there were a lot of internationals there. They were trying to find ways to get more Australian kids to that campus, to get them into business and represent that part of Australia.

**Ms PONGRAC**—Internationals are where all the money comes from. The internationals do not want to come to Frankston; they want to be treated as a student, because that is what they are used to.

**Ms ALPHEY**—Yes, and you have to be conscious of what courses are offered at each campus. For instance, Peninsula is basically health science.

**Ms PONGRAC**—We do not have many internationals at Peninsula.

**Mr DIXON**—Just a quick view on online learning: is that an option, if it is attached to study centres?

**Ms VAN DER WATH**—I did one subject online. It was very dry and it is really hard without that interaction, without asking questions. It is so hard.

**Ms PONGRAC**—I think you get distracted too easily as well, because if you are working at the same time you can then say, 'I don't have to go to class. That's three more hours I can work at my job and get some more money'—you know, grocery money or something. So you end up working too much because you do not have the constraint of having to go and attend your class.

**Mr KEATES**—It is definitely difficult. Two years ago I did an auditing course through Open Universities Australia. I found it really difficult because one of our assignments was a group assignment and, obviously, going to classes, you have to go in your forum and you have to find mates—hopefully they are close by. Everyone is doing it from overseas as well, through Open Universities. It is really difficult to be able to get that contact, especially with group members, and to rely on them to complete parts of the assignment, and obviously, without the one on one contact with lecturers and tutorials, it is so much harder. You have to wait for replies from your lecturer. They were usually pretty good, but at the same time you could get this one-line sentence or two sentences. It is just difficult.

**Ms ALPHEY**—I think the suggestion that was made in the previous presentation about having the

online learning but some interaction on campus, having those study centres, would work better for young people; that type of education.

**Ms PONGRAC**—Show them that it can be done.

**Ms TRICKEY**—You have got to report to someone as well; have that connection.

**Mr DIXON**—Yes. Thanks for that.

**Mr HERBERT**—Thank you very much for your presentation. It is very professional. In terms of the 78 per cent of students who are retained—it is such a high retention rate—it is an unusual statistic, given that you have people coming from a lot of different areas. Does the student union or the campus administration put in a conscious effort to build up campus life and bonds and links and support for students? Is that an important component and do you have any examples?

**Mr GRAY**—I think that is our role. The university gives us a grant for our organisation to function. Our role is to put on the parties, put on the barbecues, get all the clubs going; get the kids staying on campus, not going home watching TV in the middle of class, and all these things; get them to stay there and get involved in sports, go to the gym, do all these good things.

**Ms ALPHEY**—I think it is a joint effort. We are there for the students, so we know what the students want. We are starting to liaise a bit more with campus administration and we are working together to come up with different ways to implement activities and other things on campus so that students are more inclined to stay. We find at Peninsula, because it is a different culture, with health science, with students having to complete placements and so forth, that there are some weeks where 800 students could be on placement, so it does affect the facilities and so forth that are on campus.

**Ms TRICKEY**—I was going to say that we also put on festival weeks. There was Student Survival Week in week 3 to capture all the students that were maybe thinking of dropping out by week 4 when the HECS fees started to come into play. That educated students on their rights, on the counselling facilities on campus; there is a nurse and doctor with bulk-billing. We have also got the gym, which has cheaper memberships than gyms around the area, and also the library facilities. We have also got free learning support for students in the library and that is open three times a week. Students that are new to the campus or ones that come every semester would not be aware of these things unless they go and seek, and they do not know where to seek; that is why we are here. We have promotional T-shirts that we wear on those weeks so that the students know who to come to.

**Mr HERBERT**—It sounds like it is working, if you have got 78 per cent that stay right through.

**Ms ALPHEY**—It is an old statistic.

**Mr GRAY**—Two or three years old.

**Ms VAN DER WATH**—They are very good at getting feedback from students and asking what they want and where. I think Monash is the instigator for that, working in conjunction with the uni. They are very good at assessing what are the areas they need to work on.

**Ms PONGRAC**—I think Peninsula in general is a very good campus. It is a smaller campus; it is more cosy and you know your teachers better. You are not just one of many.

**The DEPUTY CHAIR**—What do you really think? There is no-one at the back end from the university. You can tell us exactly what you think of the university.

**The CHAIR**—That is very good. Thank you for coming along. We are hearing from the university campus people in just a moment, so it is really good to have your perspective, and we welcome having those personal experiences from young people in terms of helping us to formulate our views.

**Witnesses withdrew.**

# CORRECTED VERSION

## EDUCATION AND TRAINING COMMITTEE

### **Inquiry into geographical differences in the rate in which Victorian students participate in higher education**

Rosebud—12 May 2008

#### Members

Mr M. Dixon

Mr N. Elasmar

Mr P. Hall

Dr A Harkness

Mr S. Herbert

Mr G. Howard

Mr N. Kotsiras

Chair: Mr G. Howard

Deputy Chair: Mr N. Kotsiras

#### Staff

Executive Officer: Ms K. Ellingford

Research Officers: Ms C. Whiteman and Ms J. Hope

Administrative Officer: Ms N. Tyler

#### Witnesses

Ms S. Webb, Campus Manager, Monash University Peninsula Campus; and

Professor P. Steele, Pro-Vice-Chancellor Campus Coordination and Academic Director, Berwick and Peninsula campuses.

**The CHAIR**—There was a very good lead-in from your students and most of them were speaking very well of Monash.

**Prof. STEELE**—We did not pay them either, or even talk to them!

**The CHAIR**—With the Education and Training Committee being down here today, it is an ideal opportunity to hear from Monash in terms of how things are going at your Peninsula campus, and the general issue of how Monash is working to get people from the region to have the opportunity of a higher education degree. I do not know who is speaking first.

**Prof. STEELE**—We have not actually organised that yet, but, by way of introduction, Sue is the campus manager at the Peninsula campus and I am the academic director of that campus and the academic director of the Berwick campus, as well as having a role as pro-vice-chancellor campus coordination for the university, so I am interested in all the campuses and how they connect with each other. We are delighted to accept the invitation and have the opportunity to share with you our thoughts. We did put together a submission. I understand the university also made a university-wide submission, but we made a submission just on behalf of the campus and our particular LLEN. May I say we are very proud of those students. It was a wonderful experience sitting in the back stalls there to hear those young people talk about their experience.

In terms of the regional connection, it is probably fair to say that there are some internal tensions within the university. There is the Monash University group of eight. It has eight campuses and, in metropolitan Melbourne, we have Peninsula, Berwick, Caulfield, Clayton, Parkville, so there are some issues there about how we manage that. What we have tried to do at Peninsula in particular is to create a distinctive role for that campus and the academic theme we have identified is health and wellness. That gives the campus a special place in terms of the Monash campuses, so we are not competing in the sense of offering the same programs at different locations. For us as a university that is quite important.

The other comment that I would make is that the level of regional demand is probably insufficient to allow us to attain critical mass for a university campus. We have about 3,500 students at Peninsula and about 2,000 at Berwick, but the reality is that even at that 3½ thousand, we are probably a little bit small in terms of critical mass. At the Peninsula campus, probably between a quarter and a third of the students would come from the local area, which means that between two-thirds and three-quarters would come from elsewhere. That is good as far as we are concerned, but we are also cognisant of the particular challenges that exist in this region in terms of higher education, so we have been quite active in trying to address that in a number of ways.

We have established education precincts at the Peninsula campus and the Berwick campus with the TAFE, the secondary school and local government to try to work on collaborations, to start dialogue and working together. We run a number of things like VCE revision lectures for the region and I think at Peninsula we had about—was it 600 enrolments in that?

**Ms WEBB**—Around 800 to 1,000.

**Prof. STEELE**—Eight hundred. So we are trying to be active within the community to encourage people. We have a special program called Schools Access Monash and in this region we have three schools that are connected: Monterey Secondary College, Dromana Secondary College and Western Port Secondary College. In that program there are a range of activities. The students visit the university campus, we visit the school, there are information sessions and so on. It is designed to lift aspirations for university study; not that everybody has to do that, but it should be a realistic option. So we are doing quite a few things.

This is the first year we have introduced a Diploma of Tertiary Studies, which is offered from the Berwick campus but there are also some options for Peninsula study. That program has a slightly lower ENTER than the Monash competitive entry degree programs, so those students who, for a variety of reasons, cannot obtain the ENTER they require can apply to enter in the Diploma of Tertiary Studies and that is another pathway for them.

**The CHAIR**—Is that a very generalist type of diploma, is it?



**Prof. STEELE**—The way it works is that you can choose two general preparation units and the remaining six units you can choose from one of the Monash degrees offered at Berwick and/or Peninsula, so provided you pass and you obtain the appropriate level in the units, then basically you can transfer into a degree with credit. So it is a step in the right direction for us, but there still are some challenges. Berwick campus has Pakenham Secondary College and Cranbourne Secondary College as the two partner schools for the Schools Access Monash.

I remember talking to a year 12 student at Cranbourne Secondary College a couple of years ago and asking her was university study for her and she came back and said, 'Oh, give it a go, I'm only a Cranbourne kid. I couldn't go to Monash.' That to me indicates part of the challenge that we are facing, which is really about aspiration and seeing university as a realistic option that is for everybody. So it is a wide-ranging problem, a multifaceted challenge that we face. We are certainly doing some things.

I noticed the questioning earlier about transport. I do not think that that makes it any easier for many young people who do not have a car. There is a certain professor who works at the Berwick campus and lives at Cranbourne. It takes Rob an hour to get to the Berwick campus. He needs to get the bus to Narre Warren and then the train from Narre Warren to Berwick, and then walk to the campus. So transport is certainly an issue that does need addressing to make life easier. I do not know, Sue, whether you want to add anything to that?

**Ms WEBB**—Some of the things we are doing with the local communities, the local schools: we are trying to build a strong relationship with all of the local schools as well as the SAM program, which has been having varying levels of success. It depends very much on the leadership in the school. If you have a principal who is backing you up, supporting you and working with you to take full advantage of what you can offer, then it is more successful in those schools than others, and we have had some really successful ones.

We run a High Achievers program and have been working on a pilot for about a year. This year we are running the full program and we have 15 of 21 local schools involved, plus the teachers from each school, and they really have enjoyed that and taken that on well. It will add value to some of the schools that already have that kind of program in place; but other schools do not, so we are hoping that they will be motivated to put in place some programs themselves for those students. Seeing those students gain from those programs has been very satisfying.

One of the things that the students were talking about was the advice they receive about careers and the options that they have. There is a lot that can be done to improve that. Some students just do not know what their options are—even Mat, who was saying he went to TAFE and then came into Monash through that route. It would be really good if all the students who are in high school could see that as a pathway through, that they do not necessarily have to get those really high ENTERs to get a university degree, that there are lots of different options: the pathways with the TAFE, the DoTS program is another option. They do not know enough about those options.

When we ran a workshop with High Achievers to try and establish what our program would be, I was really surprised that even those students wanted more help with careers advice and choosing a university course. We have put that into the program, because they need more help with that. We do understand that it is quite difficult for staff in schools to be across all the different options that are available. It has been very rewarding working with the schools and the local LLENs and community people, to try and do what we can to improve access to Monash.

**Mr HALL**—Who do you think should bear the major responsibility for that pathways marketing that you say needs to be done better? State government? Universities? TAFE?

**Ms WEBB**—We do some of it ourselves. We have a little brochure, and I have brought some copies here. It is about pathways into programs at Monash, where we have worked with the TAFEs. It outlines all the programs that you can come into through a pathway and what you need to do. Schools and TAFEs need to promote those pathways. We all need to work together.

One of the things we ran last year, and we are doing something similar this year, was a return to study evening session, because there are a lot of students out there who have left school early and want to try to get into uni,

and it to let them know where to start—'Well, what do I need to do if I do want to go to university?' It is all about telling them what their options are. It might be to go and do a single unit or a couple of units in Open Universities or it might be to do a TAFE course or to get into DoTS or whatever, but they do not seem to know what their options are.

**Mr HALL**—Is there any collaboration between the universities in this sort of marketing effort? I understand Monash is doing its bit, and probably RMIT would argue it is doing its bit, but collectively there still seems to be a breakdown in those pathways options to kids. Whether we blame careers teachers or whether we blame state government, whether there should be a more active hands-on role across the system, I would be interested in your views.

**Prof. STEELE**—I am not aware of collaboration across the universities. I suspect there is, but I do not know for a fact.

**Ms WEBB**—Tertiary information sessions are held. Those are sessions where all the universities get involved, and the TAFEs. They are called tertiary information sessions, and they all come together to provide all of that information to all the students, so they can come along and find out from different universities and TAFEs about the pathways.

**Mr HERBERT**—Thank you for your presentation and submission. Professor Steele, the Diploma of Tertiary Studies sounds like a fantastic initiative, I must say. I will not ask how it is going if it is starting this year, but how is it funded? Is that out of HECS?

**Prof. STEELE**—Yes, they are HECS funded places.

**Mr HERBERT**—So it is a normal first-year funding place, is it?

**Prof. STEELE**—It is a normal first-year funding place, yes, and it is actually offered by our Faculty of Arts. If students wanted to pay full fee, that might be an option, but it is basically funded from Commonwealth-supported places. This year the intake, I think, was 37 or 38 students and we are hoping that next year we will be able to increase that. I see that as a good way for the university to really help people in this region who are unable to obtain the ENTER required for competitive entry to Monash.

**Mr HERBERT**—It also gives you the opportunity to see what their capabilities are.

**Prof. STEELE**—Yes, and part of it, too, is the mixing: that those students do not feel any different from people that have come in via the normal pathway. They mix in the same classes for six of the units that are the same. It is a case of really trying to make them feel at home and settle into the university environment.

**Mr HERBERT**—As you say, Peninsula is a small campus and would have a restricted number of course offerings, but one of the students, Mat, said that he did some subjects in Caulfield and some here. How flexible are you in enabling students to pick and choose? A regular degree might be business with a couple of arts units. Is that fairly easy to do?

**Prof. STEELE**—It depends very much on the course. There are some programs like, for instance, business and economics where students could undertake particular subjects at the Berwick campus or at the Peninsula campus or elsewhere, but other programs like, say, the physiotherapy program, because that is based at the campus, there might well be some units available at Clayton or other campuses, but most of them would be based at Peninsula. It is very dependent on the program and the flexibility allowed within the particular degree.

**Mr HERBERT**—I was just wondering whether it is an option in terms of enabling young people to stay in their own communities but travel a little bit for some subjects.

**Prof. STEELE**—Yes, it is interesting. One of the things we do is run shuttle buses between the Berwick campus and the Peninsula campus and Clayton, about every two hours or so. In fact, the buses leave from Berwick and Peninsula early in the morning and there are a number of students who might live near the

campus at Frankston but are studying at Clayton and they only have to find their way to the Peninsula campus. Parking is a problem, but that is another issue. They just need to find their way to the Peninsula campus, hop on that bus and then off they go to Clayton. That bus is currently free for students. So that is a step in that direction. We also have some international students that live in the Clayton area and study at Berwick, so they take the bus in the opposite direction. So we do support that, but there are some constraints by virtue of the programs and what is offered at which campus. It is quite an issue for the university to manage all of that effectively.

**Ms WEBB**—Also on that, we have some double degrees with the education faculty. Arts and science is not offered on our campus, but the students do a double degree with education, then arts, then science, and they go to Clayton to do their arts subjects and science and visual arts and music. So there are a range of courses that are open to them because they do that, and some years they will do it at Clayton, other years they will do it at Peninsula, and some years it is a combination of the two.

**The CHAIR**—You mentioned your education precinct that involves TAFE and secondary schools. What is the aim of that and what is being achieved through that?

**Prof. STEELE**—It was established originally to really lift up education, to facilitate collaboration, to facilitate more options for students and so on, so it was very much set up with the vision of 'We all have a stake in this education business' and really trying to force—well, not force—encourage collaboration. Interestingly, we also have included the Mornington Peninsula Shire and the City of Frankston as part of that precinct, and we were delighted when the City of Frankston decided to become a learning city a few years ago and helped the strategy around that. So that was in line, and we hope that the education precinct helped to encourage that sort of outcome. The VCE revision lectures is something that has gone fairly well. We have had some professional development of staff. We have had some library staff from the schools and the TAFE and the university get together and do some professional development activities. What else do we do?

**Ms WEBB**—High Achievers.

**Prof. STEELE**—The High Achievers program, of course, for the high-achieving students in the secondary schools where we run special programs. It really is an effort to establish a basis for collaborative action just to lift up the value of education and encourage collaboration amongst the various providers.

**Mr DIXON**—With small campuses, obviously some courses are marginal and you might even be subsidising them, and you have not got a critical mass so you know they are not going to be there every single year. When a course has to be dropped and subjects have to be dropped, how do you handle that and how do you manage that?

**Prof. STEELE**—With great difficulty, is the answer. In fact, if you look at the Peninsula campus, the most recent departure was from the information technology faculty. We did offer a Bachelor of Information Technology and Systems from that campus, but that was disestablished a couple of years ago, I think.

**Ms WEBB**—Yes, at the end of 2006.

**Prof. STEELE**—Yes. Previously we have had the Faculty of Arts, and that is no longer offered as a program. For us, there are probably a couple of issues. One is the critical mass, but the other is the popularity of the program amongst high-achieving students, and Monash does have a floor ENTER—that is, we do not accept students below that level of achievement unless they come in through the diploma program, and if we are unable to attract a viable cohort of students with, say, higher than a 70 ENTER, then that program is at risk. When we have to disestablish programs, we need to manage the progression of students, so sometimes there is a teach-out so that students will continue to have options at that campus or we might have options at a nearby campus such as Clayton or Berwick. It is a fairly tricky situation for us. It is probably fair to say that in that regard the Peninsula campus is tracking fairly well with the health theme, because it has given it a unique role within the Monash system. There is the student from Ballarat, for example, doing occupational therapy. It is not offered on any other Monash campus, so Monash does not have to compete with itself for high-achieving students. You come to Peninsula and that is where you do it.

Where we do have overlap—and business and economics is probably a good example—is that those programs are offered from Berwick and from Peninsula and Clayton and at Caulfield and at Gippsland. It is a little more difficult for us with the ENTERs in those programs on, say, the campus at Berwick, Peninsula and Gippsland, so we need to try to balance that carefully. That is a constraint probably. The number of high-achieving students is a constraint, so we will not offer courses where we cannot attract a significant cohort of students above the Monash floor.

**The CHAIR**—What work have you done in terms of distance education and exploring opportunities for online and other forms of distance education?

**Prof. STEELE**—The Gippsland campus has been active in the provision of flexible learning—that is the current term. We have been active in that area for really quite a number of years. The other thing I should say is that even for on-campus students things are changing, so we have many of our lectures now with audio recordings, and in fact I am involved in a Monash committee that is looking at lecture capture so we can take video recordings of lectures and have those available on the web so that the students can play those back. There is a nervousness inside the university: does this mean students will not attend lectures? It does create some tensions.

We do offer distance education, particularly from the Gippsland campus, and it does suit many students. But I must also say that the university is committed to being a people and place university, so we value the campus experience and we put a lot of effort into trying to make it a learning community and an enriching community, so that when students come onto the campus they are enriched with a lot of interaction, social interaction, but also become part of the learning community. It is a little bit harder in a distance setting to achieve that, although with technology and emails and bulletin boards, you can go some way towards that. But as a learning experience, on campus would be the preferred mode, probably for most students as well although there are students that are not suited to that.

**Mr HALL**—One of the reasons that we are down here on the Mornington Peninsula is that this region has a lower than state average participation rate in higher education. That is something that needs to be addressed. I can understand that through your Schools Access Monash program, you are doing as much as you can locally to try and lift the aspirations and lift the participation levels. Is there anything that the state government should be doing? If you were one of us sitting around this table, due to write a report in 12 months time, what would you be suggesting we could do to improve the participation rate?

**Prof. STEELE**—Coming from a research-intensive university, I would say that we need to better understand the key factors in lifting aspiration. I know there has been some research done in that area. But Monash needs to know the most cost-effective ways in which we can help and we do not have that evidence base yet. I know anecdotally we have lots of things that we think are important but I think there is a need to better understand the key issues: there is family, there is school, and a whole range of other things. But in terms of interventions, what are the most effective interventions that we could take to help? I think that would be the first point.

The second point is that, with our Schools Access Monash program, it is quite expensive per school. If you do not count the scholarship component, it is about \$25,000 per school that we invest in the Schools Access Monash. If you count the scholarships per students and so on, it would be higher than that. We cannot roll that out broadly across many schools; the task is too big for us. If there were a way for the state government to provide assistance to both the schools and the university to collaborate on the most effective strategies, I think that would be a helpful way forward.

So, firstly, it is part of understanding what the most effective strategies are, and the reality is that we do not really know the answer, so running pilots and evaluating those in a formal way I think would be very productive, but then, based on that evidence, for the state to provide support. It has to be a collaboration. It is no use just providing money to the university—'Yeah, wonderful, we'll take it and we'll put it to good use'. I think a better approach would be to fund the university and the secondary schools, and perhaps the department itself, to really form a broad-ranging program. We are involved in three underrepresented schools in this region and two underrepresented schools in the Casey-Cardinia corridor, and there are a lot more underrepresented schools out there. So the task is a large one, and I think funding for collaborations involving

the regional office as well as the secondary schools and the university would be a good way forward.

**Mr HALL**—Thank you.

**The CHAIR**—In terms of the schools that you do work with, how have they come about? Is that because you have targeted them or because the schools have come to you?

**Prof. STEELE**—It is because we targeted them in the first instance.

**The CHAIR**—Why did you target them?

**Prof. STEELE**—We had a look at the stats and identified which were underrepresented schools. So within that ballpark, it was then just geography, to some extent. But I should also say that, without mentioning names, there is another school involved in this region, and it was simply because of the wonderful forceful nature and enthusiasm of the principal that we could not walk away from becoming involved. I think, anecdotally, the school has to be committed to this. If the school is not committed, then investment of resources is totally wasted. So there has to be a balancing of those things.

**The CHAIR**—I think it is time that we break for lunch. You are welcome to come to lunch with us so that we can continue an informal conversation then on some of the other issues. Thank you for your contribution.

**Witnesses withdrew.**

**Hearing suspended.**



# CORRECTED VERSION

## EDUCATION AND TRAINING COMMITTEE

### **Inquiry into geographical differences in the rate in which Victorian students participate in higher education**

Rosebud—12 May 2008

#### Members

Mr M. Dixon

Mr N. Elasmar

Mr P. Hall

Dr A Harkness

Mr S. Herbert

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Mr N. Kotsiras

Chair: Mr G. Howard

Deputy Chair: Mr N. Kotsiras

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Executive Officer: Ms K. Ellingford

Research Officers: Ms C. Whiteman and Ms J. Hope

Administrative Officer: Ms N. Tyler

#### Witnesses

Mr C. Houlihan, Principal, and

Ms K. Burt, Careers Adviser, Padua College; and

Mr B. Ridgeway, Acting Principal, Rosebud Secondary College.

**The CHAIR**—I welcome Padua College and Rosebud Secondary College to this hearing of the Education and Training Committee. You know that today in this area in particular we are looking at the issues of people from this region being able to continue on to higher education, so we are very interested to have input from both schools. We are going to hand over to you so that you can make some general comments about your observations; suggestions that you have to make to us, and then we might want to follow up with some questions. Are we hearing from Padua first?

**Mr HOULIHAN**—Thanks, Geoff, and members of the committee. Kristen Burt is the careers coordinator at Padua College, and I invited Kristen along this afternoon as well because she is working closely with the senior students in their career aspirations, and in particular what they are able to do once they leave school at year 12. Kristen was a former member of the VCAL team in Careers at Rosebud Secondary College so she has a fair idea of what has been happening to the young people here on the peninsula.

Generally our impression, which has been fairly anecdotal over the years, has been that quite a high percentage of Padua College's students receive a tertiary offer at either uni or TAFE, but the take-up in the year after that is quite low, and the On Track data has probably indicated that over the years. Anecdotally, our thoughts are that it is pretty much to do with public transport on the peninsula being poor and access to tertiary options is therefore limited, and consequently our figures over the past few years have indicated that less than half of the students who got an offer actually took up a place in that first year. Many deferred, in the hope that they could attract more money, obviously, for their future employment. Kristen has done some recent work with our current year 12 group, too. That is pretty much just a broad sweep of Padua's impressions, and I would be happy for Kristen to add to that.

**Ms BURT**—It is a fairly succinct summary of where we stand. I thought it may be helpful, certainly from Padua's perspective, to give you, rather than the anecdotal feedback all the time, some actual statistics on the past three years for our students. We rely on the On Track and the VTAC data to track the destinations of our kids, so the front page that you are looking at is based on the On Track data. Hopefully it is clear enough. Across our year 12 levels, we are a large school, so 200-plus students will complete year 12 with us, the vast majority being VCE students and a very small percentage being in the VCAL program. Of those students doing VCE, and therefore suited to tertiary study, about 78, 79, 80 per cent will apply for tertiary placements, and it is consistent year after year, so we can rely on that on an annual basis.

As Chris has said, of that huge number of students, the majority do get places at tertiary institutions, so we cannot conclude that they are not going on to tertiary study because they do not get the results or do not get made an offer. They certainly do. And—not that I have listed it there—about 80 per cent actually get within their first three preferences, so they are getting the courses of their choice in the vast majority of cases. We are reliant on On Track data, which is not available for last year's year 12 cohort at the moment, but again the figures are consistent year after year. Of the students who get placement in tertiary courses, less than half or around half are taking up those placements; so, again, the great numbers of kids applying and getting places is far reduced when it comes to the actual black-and-white enrolment and persisting with study.

The rest is just for your information. The outcome for those remaining students outside of tertiary study is still quite feasible in that a number do go on to apprenticeships and traineeships, and a significant number are employed. It is a very small percentage that we would state as not necessarily having a meaningful outcome at the end of year 12. Again, I have really just reiterated, but in a statistical sense, what Chris has said.

In light of this inquiry, again rather than relying on purely anecdotal information, I have gone ahead and actually surveyed our current year 12 students, assuming that the trends will stay the same, that the vast majority will apply for tertiary institutes, the vast majority will get offered a place but then only about 50 per cent will go ahead and enrol, just to get some actual figures on why. Why is it that they do not take up places? Why are they choosing to defer? If they do take up places, are they commuting or are they relocating in the large number of cases? You have the survey results there.

As we expected, it is about half and half—the students that are planning to go on to tertiary study and the remainder who are intending to defer. The second point: a very small percentage of those students are planning to stay on the peninsula to study—only nine per cent. The vast majority think that they will need to go to institutes in Melbourne or other regional centres. The third point down: 33 per cent will try and live on



the peninsula, but the remainder will be commuting by car, by public transport, or a combination of both. Again, no surprise to any of us, I would not think. And then the vast majority of the students intending to defer are saying that it is simply because they need to work for a year and earn money to support themselves the following year in their tertiary study.

The final pages are purely for interest, nothing more than that. There is just a brief summary of the sorts of interest areas that our kids have. That is taken according to the number of kids that I have spoken with so far, and you can see that the list of interest areas is extensive. The reason for putting that in is really to emphasise the point that on the peninsula, through Monash University and Chisholm TAFE, we are limited in the offerings that kids can take up. A student who wants to study anthropology has no choice but to apply outside of the peninsula; so that is where the majority of our students really have no choice. They have to go outside of here. I hope it makes sense. There are lots of statistics and figures.

**The CHAIR**—Before we move on, in terms of anecdotal information, do you have any sense of how many, out of those who are deferring, do still take up their university course some time later and how many go into the workforce or simply do not take it up for other reasons?

**Ms BURT**—That is a very valid point, Geoff. From Padua's perspective, it is only anecdotal, but I suspect that, of that 40-odd per cent that defer, our take-up rate would only be about half at the end of that 12 months off. Again, it is just conversation with ad hoc kids that get in contact, but I suspect that take-up rate is quite low at the end of 12 months off.

**Mr DIXON**—Just on the deferments, I notice that over the last three years it has gone from 12 to 20 per cent and you are expecting 43 per cent this time. That is an incredible change.

**Ms BURT**—Yes, partly perhaps because of the timing. I do not know whether the kids that are indicating deferral at the moment will change their minds once they have a valid option.

**Mr HOULIHAN**—Or their parents will change their minds! We have not included that in the survey.

**The CHAIR**—Yes, that is a good point.

**Ms BURT**—There is a lot of tentativeness from the kids when they are looking ahead, not knowing what their ENTER results will be. It is quite a daunting time. Once reality hits and they know they have an offer, maybe that will lower a little.

**The CHAIR**—But even from 2005 to 2006 it is going from 12 to 20 per cent. It is statistically quite large.

**Ms BURT**—Yes. Petrol prices increase. It all comes into play.

**Mr HALL**—How long does that On Track data actually track the kids?

**Ms BURT**—The On Track data is taken as at March of the year preceding year 12, where our statistics come from. Padua is not funded to do additional tracking on top of that. Bryan may have a different—

**The CHAIR**—It might be good to hear your observations now, Bryan, and then we can have more general questions.

**Mr RIDGEWAY**—I will give you a little bit of background about the school first-up. It is a very large school, 1,460 kids, on the southern peninsula. We get an extraordinarily high percentage of kids into the school from the local government primary schools; it is well over 80 per cent and I think it could even be over 90 per cent. That is unusual. Most government secondary schools would not be getting such a big intake from local government primary schools. We have a very high percentage of families who are on some sort of government support, either through EMA or the youth allowance. A little bit over half the kids in the school are in that circumstance. And about three-quarters of the kids come to the school on buses from Portsea, going

across to Shoreham, Flinders, and probably up as far as the bottom end of Mount Martha, going across to Balnarring. So the catchment for the school geographically down here is quite large.

**The CHAIR**—You said about 50 per cent of your families are EMA, did you?

**Mr RIDGEWAY**—Yes, a little bit over 50 per cent are on EMA or youth allowance. We were classified under Like School Group 7. That categorisation has been taken out of the system recently but, in essence, it means that we have got a considerable number of the population who are on government support of one sort or another, and a very low percentage of non-English-speaking background families in the school. That is usually a profile associated with a regional school, not a metropolitan school. We are part of southern metro, and I understand that we are the only secondary school under that categorisation in southern metro.

Our VCE results are very strong. We are one of eight schools in southern metro who have an average ENTER study score of over 30. Of the other schools, half are select-entry schools, so something a bit different is happening at Rosebud that you may not find elsewhere. The VET participation and VCAL participation rates are also higher than would be expected in vis-a-vis state averages. The retention rate in the school for years 7 to 10 is down when compared to state averages, and I think that is an indication that there is a fair degree of mobility in this part of the world: families are moving out. There is a small percentage of kids who are leaving before the end of year 10 and not going on to further education, but the bigger factor is that families are moving off the southern peninsula and I think that is being driven primarily by changing land prices down here over the last five years or so. The retention rates for years 10 to 11 and 11 to 12 are pretty well around state averages; not too far off. So once the kids stick to year 10, the families tend to make the decision to stay and the kids are continuing through to the end of their education.

In terms of where they go, we are fairly similar to what Kristen and Chris were talking about. Around 30 per cent of the kids go to uni—this is last year—and these are tending to go up slightly. About 20 per cent defer—and I will come back to that; 15 per cent go to TAFE and that is, if anything, trending down over time rather than trending up; 10 per cent go to apprenticeships and about 20 per cent go on to employment. One thing we are very pleased about at the school is that there are very few kids who are leaving year 10 or later who are not going to what we would consider reasonable destinations out of school. It may not be ongoing education but it would certainly be full-time employment.

As Kristen was mentioning about Padua, most of our kids are given an offer. I think the offer rate is up in the 90s or high 80 per cent. The take-up rate is not as high, probably a little bit higher than Kristen mentioned, but not much above 50 per cent. For us, I would say that the main reason for deferrals is a financial one. The kids, if they are going to go to uni, have to leave the peninsula and that means they have living away from home expenses. You are no doubt aware that there is an opportunity for students, if they can indicate that they are independent—that is, earning more than \$17,000 or \$18,000 a year, I think—to qualify for government support through the tertiary system. So quite a few of our kids will defer after year 12 to try and access some government support so that they can put themselves through uni because they have to move off the peninsula to continue their study.

You asked, Geoff, whether we follow up on the take-up rate. We do, to a certain extent. I would have said that the deferral take-up rate is reasonably high; it would not be 100 per cent. I am not sure exactly what it is. Anecdotally I would say three-quarters, two-thirds; something of that ilk. This is because the motivation primarily is a financial one for them: they cannot afford to go to uni without some support, given that they have to move away from home. I think this is a good time to answer questions.

**Mr DIXON**—We heard earlier from the shire, and you have mentioned also, about the high numbers going to full-time employment. Are they low-skilled jobs and, if there was a downturn, would that make a difference to full-time employment?

**Mr RIDGEWAY**—Yes. I think the economic climate has certainly been a plus in that sense for kids, but it gets blurred with the deferment question. When we get the information about whether they have deferred or are going to part-time or full-time employment, there is a crossover in the data about whether the kids are doing this because they have deferred or not. Now, On Track that Kristen mentioned does not get the same data as the MIPs follow-up data from schools. We are more confident about the stuff that we find out

about on the phone, but it does not fit into the online set-up that we are required to do and which you guys have probably accessed.

**Ms BURT**—That is supported at our end, too; even to the extent that the On Track data lists kids as employed but does not verify time fractions. We all know anecdotally on the peninsula that a fair percentage of those kids saying that they are employed might be working Friday night and Saturday in a cafe in Sorrento. Do you consider that meaningful full-time employment?

**Mr RIDGEWAY**—It depends on the purpose. A kid who is doing this to get enough money to get through uni down the track is very different to someone who has just drifted out of school.

**Mr HOULIHAN**—It is a bit in the nature of the peninsula, too: with such a high leisure and tourism industry and a lot of families involved in trade and construction, young people are able to access fairly good employment opportunities, albeit on a casual basis. They are generally fairly well cashed up. Those who have got employment have a great lifestyle down here and that also lends itself to the thought that anything past Frankston seems to be a big barrier for many.

**Mr DIXON**—I would have said Mount Martha.

**Mr HERBERT**—Thank you for your presentation. We had a position put to us today that, if career counselling were a serious option in schools—the quality of the career counselling, knowledge of industry et cetera, and the quantum of it—we would probably have more students going through to tertiary education. They would know their options and could plan.

**Mr RIDGEWAY**—I would not agree with that at Rosebud. The careers team—and this includes some work placement programs from year 10 upwards; it includes some support for VCAL—is quite a large group of people. There are five people involved, not all full time, who are very experienced and very capable. I can give you some indications about it, Steve. We do get such a high percentage of kids who end up putting in a VTAC preference and once again I would agree with Kristen: kids are tending to get what they have asked for and that is an indication of the sort of level of advice that is being given. I do not think that is an inhibitor at all.

**The DEPUTY CHAIR**—What is the full-time equivalent of those five people?

**Mr RIDGEWAY**—We have got two careers teachers who are 0.7 each; we have a transition officer who is 0.5; we have someone who looks after VASS data entry, work placement programs and some general support for the careers department, who is 0.6; and the other lady who is an SSO support staff person is 0.8.

**Mr HERBERT**—So something like three and a half.

**Mr RIDGEWAY**—It is not insignificant. Chris made the point that a lot of that funding has come out of the MIPs program. That is why the team is the size that it is. Most of the MIPs money goes into that team; not all of it but most of it.

**Mr HERBERT**—So you think that is a good investment.

**Mr RIDGEWAY**—Yes.

**Mr HERBERT**—I will continue with this theme. Would it be harder for smaller secondary schools to muster that sort of resource?

**Mr RIDGEWAY**—Yes. I know that there are schools on the peninsula—we get quite a high level of MIPs funding—who are a bit miffed, I suppose, because we get a higher level. But it is connected to our socioeconomic circumstance, in part. You are probably aware of that. The model that we use at Rosebud—and I am sure it is what Kristen is doing at Padua—is a case-managing one, so as the school gets bigger you need more time if you are going to sit down with each kid and talk to them repeatedly and at length about career choices over a period of three years. It needs a lot of time if you are going to do it properly. The people

involved need to get to know the kids; not just cruise in, have a chat, 'Here's a career.'

**The CHAIR**—The other part of that, I suppose, is the skills of the careers teacher—and it is good having Kristen here, as well as your observations, Bryan. What are their skills? How do they ensure that they are updated in terms of alternative pathways rather than just, 'You get your ENTER that gets you into your course, or there might be some pathways via TAFE, or other things that might be worth looking at'?

**Ms BURT**—I think we are in a bit of a transition phase at the moment, in the sense that up until three years ago anyone was able to take on a careers role. Although this is not mandated as yet, there is now certainly a push for careers staff to have some sort of qualification. I have just finished my postgraduate certificate in careers education—I have my final assignment in my bag. That has been an intense 18 months to complete that masters-level training, which I trust gives me a relevant qualification to endorse what I am doing. But, yes, we are still in a transition phase, because I think amongst the peninsula based careers teachers approximately half of us have that level of qualification. But certainly amongst careers teachers there is ongoing professional development in all sorts of forums to stay abreast, and the push at the federal level certainly is that we gain the appropriate training and work at the professional level to support these young people.

**Mr RIDGEWAY**—I think experience on the job is really important. Certainly having academic quals behind you is critical, but I think the implication is that these courses being offered by universities and, for that matter, TAFE colleges, are changing frequently and you just need to be on top of it. The local careers teacher networks are very strong. We had a situation last year where a longstanding fellow who had headed up our careers team retired, and finding a replacement for him was a bit of a challenge. It was a good thing that the people behind him, the rest of the people left in the team, were pretty well up to speed on what was going on.

**Mr HALL**—We have heard about the very high level of satisfaction in terms of those worthwhile outcomes which you mentioned you have achieved at both of your schools. Despite this region having a low participation level in higher education, I think you have emphasised that that is not the be all and end all, that there are other outcomes which are equally as worthwhile, so is there an issue that we as a committee therefore need to worry about down here on the Mornington Peninsula?

**Mr RIDGEWAY**—In terms of accessing university?

**Mr HALL**—And in terms of educational outcomes probably—a more general question.

**Mr RIDGEWAY**—Certainly at the tertiary level there is a crisis. So many of our young people just do not feel it is an option; therefore, they put their energies and enthusiasms into other areas.

**Mr HALL**—Which are worthwhile in themselves.

**Mr HOULIHAN**—They are. However, it does, I think, limit our young people. Because they are not part of the metropolitan region, they do not have the opportunity to be able to just get on a tram or a train and get to Melbourne or Monash. Our results, certainly within the Catholic sector, are as good as any of the Catholic coeducational regional colleges, and yet our uptake rates are quite low compared to an Emmaus or an Aquinas or Loyola college across the metropolitan area. Our kids are from very much almost a monocultural background, which is also a feature of the peninsula. We do not have very many ESL students or students from ethnic minorities in the school at all, and we do find there is almost a bit of laconic Aussie-ness—'Okay, it's a bit hard to get there. Mum and dad have a good house and a good place near the beach, so let's stay.' That has been my impression in coming to Padua eight years ago from suburban schools and from other parts of country Victoria where I grew up.

It is a very different part of the world. In a lot of ways it is like Perth. I lived in Perth for 13 years, and there is a bit of an isolationist mentality there, and I think there is in the peninsula. I am very happy to be a resident here, and my daughter will become one of these students we are talking about in the next decade, as Martin's children were when they went through Padua. There is something quite unique about this area, but I do think it is something which does stop—

**The DEPUTY CHAIR**—So you're to blame for his children!

**Mr HOULIHAN**—They were very good young people, weren't they, Martin?

**Mr DIXON**—They are fantastic!

**Mr RIDGEWAY**—For us, the obvious university partnership is Monash, and we have some link with the Frankston campus but the range of courses there is limited in terms of what the kids would like to take up. Getting to the next nearest site—and that is Clayton and then probably, more recently, Caulfield—is not easy. Certainly, if kids could access those sites relatively simply, it would be a different situation. But I agree entirely with what Chris has said. There are jokes about Mount Martha, but people are hesitant to go north of it. It is probably a bit hard to take that on board in terms of policy, but I think that if there were easy transport, that would go a long way towards overcoming that hesitation. Certainly to get to Frankston campus and Monash Uni—there is a shuttle bus to Clayton from there that I think the university is running regularly at a very low price. If we could get them to that site easily and quickly, it would help a lot I think.

**Mr HALL**—What about the presence of Chisholm down in the southern end of the peninsula: do they have a major focus?

**Mr RIDGEWAY**—We have got strong links with them, but more through programs for kids of 15 to 19 years of age—pre-apprenticeship programs, things of that nature, rather than certificate IV courses.

**The DEPUTY CHAIR**—Aren't there any programs that Chisholm or the university offers to schools to lift the aspirations of students?

**Mr HOULIHAN**—We have certainly had the Enhancement programs from Melbourne and Monash, but recently we have struggled to keep Enhancement running at Padua College in chemistry because Monash decided that it was not a financially viable outcome and that students would have to go to either Clayton or Scotch College, I think. We have managed to get it back up again through a lot of Kristen's input, and through our chemistry teacher. That is the nature of our community schools; we all cluster together. For example, one of our schools will run philosophy as an enhancement and another will run chemistry, and that is a first-year university course that our year 12 students are able to go to, and students from other schools will come to after-school classes, and it is a similar situation with our students doing vocational education and training. All of our schools are very much clustering together to try and provide a better cost for our students, as well as access to the various cert I and II courses that we offer, but when you get up to post secondary then the limit, the ceiling, really steps in.

**Mr RIDGEWAY**—Picking that point up, transport is an issue even with the Enhancement programs. Philosophy I is run at Mount Eliza, I think.

**Mr HOULIHAN**—Yes.

**Mr RIDGEWAY**—For our kids to get to it, they have to get up there on a Monday by 4.30 and they have to get back at 6.30, and, if mum or dad cannot drive them, to get public transport is not going to happen.

**Mr HOULIHAN**—And we are the same as Rosebud. We have nearly 30 buses leave our two campuses of a night. Eighty per cent of our students would be on a bus somewhere, and, if they are not on that 3.25 bus, a lot of parents are unable to collect them.

**Ms BURT**—Monash Uni has also had a fairly recent push on the Frankston campus to turn it into very much a health-orientated campus to fit in with the health precinct. As a result, quite prestigious courses are now based at that campus: physiotherapy, occupational therapy and so on. I think it has worked well for them. It is a very high-scoring campus as a whole, but it out-competes a number of our kids. Not every student is capable of getting a 95-plus to get into physiotherapy. They have almost out-competed a lot of the local kids, in some ways.

**Mr HALL**—Even an 84 for nursing, yes.

**Ms BURT**—Absolutely. Yes, it is one of the highest nursing scores in the state.

**Mr HALL**—Monash told us this morning about their Schools Access Monash program with three secondary colleges on the peninsula here. Does that program hold any interest for your schools? Would you be involved?

**Mr RIDGEWAY**—What exactly is it, Peter?

**Mr HOULIHAN**—Melbourne have an access program.

**Ms BURT**—Yes.

**Mr HALL**—Schools Access Monash was explained to us as a program whereby they build up a distinct liaison and greater involvement with three secondary colleges on the Mornington Peninsula, with students going to the campus on experience, and staff going to the schools and talking to the kids.

**Mr RIDGEWAY**—We are not involved in it.

**The CHAIR**—No. It is very much directed towards those schools which normally have a low number of students going on to higher ed., which does not sound like your sort of circumstances. But that is certainly something that might still benefit your students.

**Mr RIDGEWAY**—Certainly links make it easier for kids. We are talking, too, about a kid who has just turned 18 or is still 17, and to leave home, which is what they are looking at if they want to go to uni, is a big step for a lot of them. It does not mean they cannot do it, but it is a big step.

**The CHAIR**—But you are saying your figures are somewhat similar to Padua, and you are saying that 81 per cent of your students are applying for tertiary education, so it is not as though the aspiration levels are low; it is the take-up levels that are more questionable. Given the 50 per cent EMA component, it is a pretty high level, I would have thought, for your school. You have obviously worked pretty well to raise the aspirations for tertiary education.

**Mr RIDGEWAY**—Yes, and that is picking up something that Steve was asking me about earlier. I think the careers teachers tend to be very good. That is one of the reasons that these high numbers of applications to VTAC are going in. It is because the time is spent with every kid, and it is something that the school talks about: that that is why education is there; it is meant to create opportunities in life. We present that sort of concept to kids repeatedly over six years. The concept of kids thinking they might go on that way is reasonably strong in the school, and it is supported by the school, but it gets to this hard, pointy end when they have to leave home and move from the southern peninsula. There is no university down here. You would find the same thing, I am sure, if you went to Swan Hill or—I do not know—Warrnambool.

**The CHAIR**—Thank you very much for your time.

**Mr RIDGEWAY**—Good luck with your deliberations.

**Witnesses withdrew.**

# CORRECTED VERSION

## EDUCATION AND TRAINING COMMITTEE

### **Inquiry into geographical differences in the rate in which Victorian students participate in higher education**

Rosebud—12 May 2008

#### Members

Mr M. Dixon

Mr N. Elasmar

Mr P. Hall

Dr A Harkness

Mr S. Herbert

Mr G. Howard

Mr N. Kotsiras

Chair: Mr G. Howard

Deputy Chair: Mr N. Kotsiras

#### Staff

Executive Officer: Ms K. Ellingford

Research Officers: Ms C. Whiteman and Ms J. Hope

Administrative Officer: Ms N. Tyler

#### Witnesses

Ms V. Leggett, and

Ms H. McNamara, Manager, Strategic Planning, Chisholm Institute of TAFE (Rosebud Campus).

**The CHAIR**—Welcome to the Education and Training Committee. You know that we are undertaking an inquiry, looking at geographic variations in terms of students going on to tertiary and higher education and, in Rosebud today, we have heard from a broad group of people—from LLENs, various schools, students and so on—so it is good to have Chisholm here for your contribution. We would be pleased to hear any presentation that you have to make, in terms of what you are doing and your observations and recommendations, and then we will have some questions following on from that.

**Ms McNAMARA**—Thank you very much for the opportunity. The paper I have just passed around is some supplementary information that you requested, so if I may I will go through that, hit the high points and then come back to the basis of the argument that Chisholm is putting forward to the committee. You asked, firstly, what was our overall size. We have 48,000 course enrolments per annum; 38,000 students. The nature of TAFE is that it can be as short as one day and as long as one year, so I did a normal calculation and I think annually it is between 14,500 and 15,000 effective full-time students. That is the easiest way to look at it, to compare it with other organisations. There is our principal catchment and, as you can see, we go all the way down to Wonthaggi. The closest metropolitan campus would be Dandenong. This year we have moved all of our programs out of Noble Park and that is now a site for AMES.

The second question is: what is our catchment? The largest catchment is the city of Casey for us. I should point out to you that there is a distribution across all campuses, depending upon the courses and the profile of a particular campus, so you will find that there are students from the city of Casey training at Rosebud. Why? Because the turf programs are there. The shire of Mornington Peninsula is our second-largest catchment. I think you can regard Mornington and Frankston as a very well established training market; whether it is for us or any of the other providers. That includes Holmesglen, RMIT, William Angliss. We have students travelling to all of those destinations and annually we have around 3,000 students from the peninsula. As I said before, you must remember that that is not 3,000 full-time students.

In terms of our commercial programs—because that profile is 30 per cent of what we do—equally, Mornington Peninsula is important to us. So once you gain employment, you might be coming back to do a range of activities with us. That could be as simple as getting a forklift licence through to many other things. Over the leaf again: the size of the campuses was another question; Dandenong and Frankston. It is very simple: they are the largest sites and they have the specialist equipment. Places like Rosebud have been developed as small satellite campuses and they have a direct relationship. Rosebud has a direct relationship with Frankston, just as Berwick and Cranbourne have with Dandenong. It is set up in zones, in effect, so that we can maximise the opportunities for students. It may be that we will run the first year of something at Rosebud, with the expectation that the students then do the remainder of the course at Frankston: they are older, they have more money in their pockets; they have possibly got a car by then.

Age profile: we have a very high youth profile at Chisholm. We have 8,000 students in that youth profile—this is the 15- to 19-year-olds. We have 15,000 under the age of 24, which I think is quite a significant proportion of our age profile.

The major industry sectors that we deliver to are the traditional trades—business services and many of the high-end electrotechnology disciplines, engineering electrotechnology—focused largely at Frankston, Dandenong and Berwick. We also have, again, a burgeoning youth market with the development of a technical education centre at Berwick. I will speak to that later.

Student fees and charges on page 5, another question: 22.4 per cent of our student body in 2007 received fee relief of some kind or another, so we do tend to attract students from the lower socioeconomic groups; those who are on health cards, all sorts of allowances. You will see some of those allowances mentioned for you: low income, special benefits, pensions of various kinds; newstart, youth allowance. Significant numbers of students are able to attend for the minimum fee available, which I think at the moment is \$70. So \$70 for a year's training is not too bad. They do have to pay for some materials on top of that but it is fairly good.

Then we come to what is perhaps of more interest to you and that is the VTAC enrolments. At Chisholm they are very small. Of the 24,000, 25,000 government funded training places that we deliver each year, only 5,000 are VTAC applicants and only 630 actually enrol. Why is there a difference between those two numbers?



Offers from various other institutions. If you have a choice between doing IT at Chisholm and doing IT at Monash, you are going to take Monash, if you can get in, generally speaking. There are only one or two IT courses that have occupational outcomes that are specific to the industry and specific to the employment within that industry. The conversion rate on offers is 56 per cent. So we have 'applicants 5,000'. You can see the number of offers and then the number of enrolments. The overall conversion rate is only 13 per cent. We do not expect it to be any different in the future, unless of course the costs to the student of engaging in another form of education rise to the point where more of them are knocking on our door.

The top 20 courses I have shown you overleaf. For all but four of those courses, we have articulation arrangements with an appropriate higher education institution. There are very viable pathways through those courses. The ones on that page represent 50 per cent of those enrolments that you saw on the previous page. You can see that there is an abundance of accounting and IT. Other courses like professional writing and editing—which, by the way, is articulated with Monash—are much more specialised. Liberal arts, once again, is much more specialised. The one that we are really pleased about is children's services.

Conservation and land management: I see on your agenda for today that you are meeting with the Australian Maritime College. That should be an interesting conversation because they are housed at our campus in Rosebud which we are very pleased about. I might offer you my informal perception of that in a minute or two. Chisholm does its own Graduate Destination studies. It is usual that NCVER conducts these with VET providers, and TAFE institutions in particular. We did a study of the 2006 Graduate Destination group because we wanted to do some in-depth work on what were the pathways that students were taking up. I am quite happy to leave that report with you if you are interested. They are very complex pathways, and in our region there is not necessarily a one to one mapping between the job you have before you start training with us, the course you do, and the occupation you have as a result of that training. Seventy per cent of the students have the same occupation before and after the course.

This is an indication of the complexity of the labour market within the region and the difference between opportunity and aspiration. They could be training with us because 'I want to do lab techs.' Blood splattering, by the way, is a competency in lab techs. They get hooked into the crime shows on television and want to learn a bit more about it. Nonetheless, they still work as a medical receptionist. There are all of these sorts of dialogues that we could have for quite some time about those complexities, and they are even more difficult for the youth of the region, in particular Mornington Peninsula/Bass Coast, because of the regional and rural nature of those economies. For the under-20-year age group, the pathway to employment is half of what it is for any other age group. They are the group that tend to take up the further education pathway; hence, the cluster of courses that you see at the top of that page are the ones that are taken up by the youth of the region.

Nonetheless, we try and help out, with multiple arrangements with universities, and I have listed the current ones for you. If we take Monash, for example, the first two courses I would say were difficult to negotiate. VET operates in a competency based environment and, of course, the universities do not, so to line up the two outcomes side by side is a somewhat difficult and complex task. In fact, we have to make our courses resemble the subjects that exist for the university—this is not just Monash now—and we often provide supplementary learning outcomes in order to better articulate those arrangements.

When we can negotiate them, they are definitely advantageous to the student and form a very valid pathway. We do know from published research that those students who enter from a VET environment—this is not just Chisholm now—do particularly well within the higher education sector. On the other hand, you may well have heard from the schools today about all the On Track data that is available, and, of all of the students who enter, for example, from the Mornington Peninsula directly into higher education, 25 per cent drop out during the journey. So I am suggesting that there are multiple pathways to the same set of outcomes, and for some students to begin in TAFE and then progress on to higher education is a very valid option that we should take on board as part of the complexity of living in a regional location. It could be more advantageous.

I should also say that, in the relationships with Monash, sport development is about primary school teaching. These are the people who end up as phys. ed. teachers, and nursing is an obvious one for Frankston, with the precinct. We are engaged, we are part of the educational precinct with Monash University at Frankston. Justice is particularly important in this region, in any region of growth in infrastructure. We are in the growth corridor of Melbourne where there is pressure to provide adequate regional recreational youth services, so this

is where this one comes in. We do have lots of brochures and other materials to advise you. We do have a full range of services. I hope that answers your questions in terms of the supplementary material.

Now I go back to the submission that was forwarded to you by our CEO, Virginia Simmons. From Chisholm's perspective, whilst we do operate a campus at Rosebud, the majority of the activity is between Rosebud and Frankston. Rosebud acts as a feeder to Frankston. We think that one of our roles is to establish partnerships with the schools—and we have many on the peninsula, including the three who spoke to you just a few minutes ago—and to develop those higher education pathways for our students. So we sit in this very complex arrangement right smack dab in the middle.

I am sure that you have heard that the percentage of persons with VET qualifications on the peninsula is higher than the metro average and that the percentage of persons with higher education is lower—all of those sorts of things. There are three things that we feel really are influencing this. The first is student aspiration. You look at Bob Birrell's work at Monash. He is talking about inner Melbourne being the locus of the professional occupations and professional qualifications and the outer rim being the focus of the trade qualifications, so students will often reflect the aspirations of their families. I do not think that we should expect too much else. The other thing that happens is that their families want them all to go to university. However, you have to leave your region in order to be able to do that. You have to be able to afford to leave your region, and that is the nub of it. For all the students that we speak to, cost and distance and lack of transport infrastructure are the factors that influence their decision making, in a nutshell.

The last thing that we are very mindful of with the Mornington Peninsula in particular is that there are pockets of extreme social disadvantage, where to attend any post-secondary option is difficult, let alone higher education, so we do need a range of services. Rosebud West comes to mind, which, it was noted in the report *Dropping off the edge*, is the most disadvantaged area in Victoria.

I think the moment you have a buoyant labour market, you have a lower participation in education and training. Students will take up the jobs in order to get a bit of money in their pockets, and then they are likely to re-engage in education and training. In the Chisholm studies on that re-engagement, we find that it can take six to seven years before people will re-engage with education and training. They have left school early and they have gone out there. They have either been successful in getting a job and doing whatever they want to do, or they are unsuccessful and they will come back within two years. So we have these two age groups. You get the school leavers who go straight through; the early school leavers who are unsuccessful and it is very difficult to get back in, and the early school leavers who are successful and come in six, seven years later. It is quite an interesting pattern.

I think it is also reasonable for young people to expect to live within their environment. You may have heard how difficult it is for some young people to relocate to engage in higher education. They do not particularly want to do it, it is very expensive, and they are socially isolated. I have seen that in some work I was doing with Deakin in helping students, through my family, to become engaged in the Deakin community, which is much more difficult to do now that the union fees have gone, and the clubs and activities have collapsed somewhat. This is all part of the picture.

With regard to the rise of VCAL and VET in Schools, we have seen in the last five years an exponential rise within our region in VET in Schools. Not only do we do the training ourselves but we also auspice other schools—for example, one of the schools you had here. Those pathways are very good at keeping young people engaged, but there is a hidden trap, and I do not know if any of you have seen the VET in Schools review that was conducted a couple of years ago. One of the things that is happening with VET in Schools, unless you have some fairly guided direction for the students, is: 'I love field hockey; therefore, I'll do the VET in Schools program about recreation.' There is no intention of turning it into an educational pathway. 'I just like playing field hockey.' Or there is the high number of people who do retail.

If you wanted to do a VET in Schools Retail, I think your expectation would be that you are going to leave school, whereas the higher cost courses—general construction, electrical; all of those things—are much harder to engage in because schools do not have the facilities to do the certificate II competencies. The other problem that you have with auspicings, in particular, is the quality assurance that is needed on staff quals. Schools do not have engineers any longer; they do not have people who have trade quals. So it is very difficult to run

these programs within the context of a school; even more difficult in a buoyant market because the people who are chippies or electricians or plumbers certainly do not like the salaries that are offered within a VET environment, so they do not want to leave and come back and train other people.

So we do a lot of auspicing but we also have some very smart arrangements with schools—like Mornington—where they do the training with our quality assurance and we transport the students down to Frankston to do part of the assessment, so that they do part of it within the VET environment, along with all the other apprentices, and then they can come back and do year 2 of their program within the high-tech environment because the school cannot deliver on it. There are lots of arrangements like that that we can put in place and are putting in place. Of course, over at Berwick we have the technical education centre which is being built as we speak. It is no longer a grassy paddock; there are things emerging out of the ground. We are hoping to offer more programs in the TEC next year.

At the moment, we are running what I hope will be a very successful one. It is called a multitrade program, where you come in, you do a bit of electrical, a bit of tiling, a bit of plumbing et cetera, so that you have created, in effect, a career guidance pathway. All of their students are supported through the MIPs program and so on. We will also be running an introduction to health and community services; there is another one for children's services. So there will be just as many pathways for the girls as there are for the boys. It is sometimes difficult to achieve with the dominance of the traditional trades in our press at the moment.

VCAL/Vet in Schools: yes, important; quite important to us. One of the problems that we will have with it in the future is the definition 'guaranteed place'. The guaranteed place in Victoria is for year 12, or equivalent to, certification. So if you have done your Certificate II in Recreation at a school and you come to us to do nursing, you will not be Youth Guarantee eligible because you have an equivalent certificate II. So we might need to pay attention to that in time, because it will exclude a lot of young people from the appropriate support; not that we are saying that we would; we will not. We will simply include them anyway. But in terms of our revenue base, it will be a definite problem. That is VET in Schools and VCAL.

You have undoubtedly heard of the low costs and infrequent transport services. I will not bore you with that. 'Dislocation. Adjusting to a city lifestyle.' Let me move straight to the end. 'Support the growth of technical and vocational education': you have got a funding issue with Vet in Schools. 'Guaranteed place. Youth allowance'. Our understanding of the reason why a lot of young people do not go on to higher education and come to us is that they cannot get youth allowance or any subsidy: clear as a bell.

The Australian Maritime College is an excellent example of establishing a learning hub. One of the first things that happened when they suggested that they would like to use our Rosebud campus as a site for training was that we discovered we had a broadband issue. As you know, they conduct a lot of their learning by live video links with Hervey Bay, Launceston and the like. The infrastructure on the peninsula could not support that to begin with. I had to do some magic there.

The other thing is just simply to expand the level of VET in the region. We are in a high-growth region. We can articulate for you the various pathways directly into higher education, through us into higher ed., through VET et cetera. But without government funded support in the volume of training that is needed, young people will still be excluded, whichever way you look at it. It is the growth that is going to drive a lot of what we do in the future. I might leave it there.

**The CHAIR**—Okay. Let us go to some questions.

**The DEPUTY CHAIR**—How do you go into schools and advise kids of the types of courses that you are offering?

**Ms McNAMARA**—Part of one of our services, which operates through marketing, is in fact a schools program. It is a travelling roadshow. Not only do we attend all of the established expos and the like but we go to every secondary college and we can present to the students, meet with them, talk with them, and vocational counsellors are there. What we really like to do is to send the program coordinators or a teacher. There is nothing more powerful than talking to a plumber or an electrician, so you can organise any of those sorts of things. We have an active program which rolls around the region all of the time. Schools request it.

We also have the other way: we have tried trade days. We have TAFE tasters. We get 16 buses of students come in. The whole of Frankston campus is devoted to them. All of the staff are the tour guides, and away we go. So they have an opportunity to talk to people about what it is like to work in that area, as well as to study, because that is what they are interested in. They want to know what the relationship is between the study and the work so you need people already in the industry, in my view, to accomplish that in a respectable way.

**The DEPUTY CHAIR**—Thank you.

**Mr HALL**—My question is a quick one. It is on pathways marketing. I asked the university this before.

**Ms McNAMARA**—Yes.

**Mr HALL**—How can we do it better? It seems to me that we do not do it all that well—that is, market the different pathways to higher education, and TAFE is a strong one of those pathways.

**Ms McNAMARA**—We can do that better if the universities are prepared to do that better. We have a publication called *What can I do without my VCE?* That is an articulation of all of the pathways.

**Mr HALL**—Is that a Chisholm specific document?

**Ms McNAMARA**—It is a Chisholm specific document. I could forward it to you, if you would like to have it. That is part of that travelling roadshow, too. It is a matter of the map between aspiration, information and timeliness. In this mad, 'I will put in all these VTAC applications,' as the offers roll through, they have to make decisions. More often than not they are making decisions on the basis of what their friends know—we are talking about January now—what they can access on the internet, so on the Chisholm site pathways are very prominent, and we have all the logos of the universities with whom we have partnerships and memoranda of understanding. I think we have to turn it into something that a kid will know to look for when they are trying to make these decisions, because otherwise they will not touch it. They will not look for it, they will not know about it necessarily.

**Mr HALL**—It seems to me that we have to do it better in a generic sort of way.

**Ms McNAMARA**—Yes.

**Mr HALL**—I think TAFE institutes across Victoria need to cooperate—and, indeed, universities you say equally.

**Ms McNAMARA**—Yes.

**Mr HALL**—Maybe state governments need to play a leading role in a generic marketing program to better define those pathways.

**Ms McNAMARA**—We have to get that marketing down to the secondary school student when they need it. That is the hard part. You can produce a thousand brochures with the world's best information but if they are not going to open the front cover you have not achieved anything. It is the timeliness that I keep coming back to.

**Mr HALL**—Thank you.

**The CHAIR**—We know some of the issues are economic in terms of students applying for university courses and then deciding they had better take a year off because they cannot get on to youth allowance or whatever. Do they understand—and I ask this because I do not understand—the effective cost differences between doing a TAFE pathway and a direct university pathway, and is that an issue?

**Ms McNAMARA**—I do not think it is an issue. I think they find out when they come to us to apply

for the course that there is no HECS, if that is what you are referring to.

**The CHAIR**—But then do they know it up-front?

**Ms McNAMARA**—No, they do not know that up-front, to my knowledge.

**Ms LEGGETT**—No, I do not think so.

**Ms McNAMARA**—No. In the thousands of students that we survey and talk to each year it is not visible.

**The CHAIR**—That is why I wonder whether some of that sort of information should be provided up-front too: that this is not just pathways, but these are the cost ramifications under the present system.

**Ms McNAMARA**—Which will change if the training reforms come in, obviously. We will see the impact of that eventually. It is going to be quite an opportunity, in my view.

**Mr DIXON**—Can I compliment Rosebud-Chisholm on their Xpress program. We had Community VCAL in this morning, and this is like a pre Community VCAL, for kids who are scared off learning, full stop, and they have two programs a year and they have an 80 to 90 per cent success rate of students going back to school or going to VCAL or moving on to Chisholm, and it actually takes place at Chisholm. It is fantastic.

**Ms McNAMARA**—Yes. There are a number of those equity initiatives across the institute. We have another one at Dandenong, working with young Indigenous secondary school students, connecting them with an adult environment, with the support of the elders, so that they remain in school but they understand the pathway because they are already doing part of their work within that pathway. There is another program for young mums, and mums and their children attend the Cranbourne campus, and the Xpress program has been very successful. It has been put forward for a training award, which I am really pleased about. It is excellent. There are a number and a range of those initiatives operating because we do want to break down that level of disadvantage in places like Doveton, Rosebud West, Frankston North, Hampton Park, Springvale. It is amazing.

**The CHAIR**—Very good. Thank you very much for that contribution.

**Witnesses withdrew.**

**Hearing suspended.**



# CORRECTED VERSION

## EDUCATION AND TRAINING COMMITTEE

### **Inquiry into geographical differences in the rate in which Victorian students participate in higher education**

Rosebud—12 May 2008

#### Members

Mr M. Dixon

Mr N. Elasmar

Mr P. Hall

Dr A Harkness

Mr S. Herbert

Mr G. Howard

Mr N. Kotsiras

Chair: Mr G. Howard

Deputy Chair: Mr N. Kotsiras

#### Staff

Executive Officer: Ms K. Ellingford

Research Officers: Ms C. Whiteman and Ms J. Hope

Administrative Officer: Ms N. Tyler

#### Witnesses

Ms C. Wilson, and

Mr D. Crockett, Executive Consultant, Australian Maritime College.

**The CHAIR**—We have our last presentation for the day. This is from David Crockett and Clare Wilson from the Australian Maritime College, who are providers in the area. David, you can talk about your situation here, and we will go on from there.

**Mr CROCKETT**—The Australian Maritime College up till 1 January this year was a federal statutory authority set up by the federal government many years ago to do maritime and related training, essentially to meet international obligations under IMO where Australia needed a training institution to be able to sign some of the international agreements. That was where the Australian Maritime College started, and it was a specialist institution, very industry based. We have widened it slightly in recent times to get more into marine environment and some of the associated maritime areas rather than just shipping and fishing, but we still under our charter are required to do maritime or maritime related work.

As from 1 January this year we integrated with the University of Tasmania. We are still branded as the Australian Maritime College. Instead of being a federal body, we are an institute of the university. Most universities have institutes that are semi-autonomous. We have our own board. The major difference is that, instead of reporting to the federal minister, we report to the university council.

Our venture into the Mornington Peninsula was based around the site at Point Nepean, the quarantine station. We proposed to have a campus based around marine environment, sustainability and those sorts of interests. It was seen as an idyllic location, with the sea on one side and the bay on the other, and the federal government was in the process of trying to move the park into the Victorian national parks. The quarantine station were looking, as I understand it, for things that were not industry or housing; they were looking at creating an education precinct, museums and those sorts of things down there. I do not know whether we were approached or we approached somebody, but we got involved in the very early stages, and we were going to set up on Point Nepean—and we advertised it in that way—as a specialist marine environment/coastal conservation centre.

For various reasons—and I am not exactly sure what all of them are—none of that transpired. We were promised that it would be ready in 2006, but it is now 2008 and, as I understand it, nothing has progressed by way of the buildings and things, and our site and the plans we drew up and the planning that was started has now been taken up by the University of Melbourne, who are looking to put a campus down there which I understand will be quite different to ours. Ours was to run all of a degree course. My understanding is that they are going to use it for research and for weekly visits—for instance, geologists will go out looking for rocks in certain areas. They are going to use it for zoology and biology and marine sciences. In talking to Melbourne university people, they have got the same conditions that we understood we were going to get: go in on a rent-free basis as an anchor tenant to start the process. After some time we got into negotiations, and people were looking for commercial rents and things, for a small, isolated campuses you just cannot do it, it is not viable unless it is subsidised significantly.

We got to the stage where we were advertising for students, and clients were getting concerned. They were wanting to get down to that site, because it was one of the attractions for putting the campus there. It just did not occur, and we could not see, from all the meetings and things that we went through, that it was going to occur in the short term, so we took a hard decision and moved the teaching back to Launceston for that degree. We had a commitment to teach out those that wanted to stay here or had to stay here for various reasons and I think, of the 23 students that started this year that were there last year, nine stayed here and the other 14 moved to Tassie. We did provide financial assistance to those that moved—not as compensation but for reimbursement of costs—and the students that moved over there are very happy. They see that it is a better education environment and they are generally fitting in very well. There are a lot more chances for part-time work and various other things, and it is a much better education experience, because one of the things offered by universities is to be able to mix with people in engineering and the arts and all those sorts of things, which we could not offer down here.

So following that decision we have moved the degree back to Newnham in Launceston. For your interest, we have also moved the higher education section of our operation at Beauty Point—which is down near the mouth of the river in Launceston, 55 kilometres out—for very similar reasons. It was not working, so we moved the higher education sections up to Newnham and put them all together. It is a much better educational



environment.

In regard to our numbers here, we planned for an intake of 40 each year and our market research showed that that was very feasible, but it never occurred. When we rang around to people who said that they would apply and did not turn up, one of the big things they said was, 'Well, you're not at Point Nepean.' It was a detriment to us. While Chisholm were marvellous in what they did for us, it is not higher education as in a university environment, so there were some issues with that. We thought we were only going to be at Chisholm for one year. If we had kept our course here I would have been surprised if we were at Point Nepean before 2010; I have always said 2010, and I suspect it might have been longer. Is that enough background?

**The CHAIR**—Yes. So the nine students that you still have staying in Victoria are continuing their course where?

**Mr CROCKETT**—At Chisholm. We have built a demountable attached to their premises and most of the teaching is done in there; plus also in some labs in the Chisholm Institute. We use videoconferencing to the lectures in Launceston, which is common. Staff come over for individual things, or come over for three or four days, and do lectures that would go for several weeks. That is common amongst universities in rural districts. We have also got staff based here and we employ lecturers from other universities, on a casual or part-time basis, who come down and do specific courses.

**Mr HALL**—What is the degree that those students are doing, David?

**Ms WILSON**—Marine and coastal conservation.

**Mr HALL**—Where will that take them? What sorts of outcomes will they have?

**Ms WILSON**—A combination, with a policy and law focus. Primarily we market to students to explain to them that to have a purely science background or a purely management background lacks the part in between, which is to be able to consult and speak to laypeople about the impact of climate change and environmental issues. We feel that the course carves out a nice niche market and, as David said, we had a lot of positive feedback from prospective students in this area about a course of this nature. So we did feel that we were on the mark with that offering.

**Mr HALL**—Your target was local, was it—the Mornington Peninsula?

**Mr CROCKETT**—No, it was national and international, but with very much an emphasis here. In our courses in the early days, less than 10 per cent of our students were Tasmanian, but it is a little more now.

**Mr HALL**—Did you go through VTAC?

**Mr CROCKETT**—Yes, we are a member of VTAC. We got 10 or so students, mainly to come to Tassie, but they also came here, when we were here. They nearly all came through VTAC because they were mainly Victorian students; not just from the Mornington Peninsula. We had some from Gippsland, some from the city and from Geelong. It was quite a mixture.

**The DEPUTY CHAIR**—Did any of the students from here go to Tassie?

**Mr CROCKETT**—Yes.

**Ms WILSON**—Yes.

**Mr CROCKETT**—As I said, 14 moved over there.

**The DEPUTY CHAIR**—How many stayed there?

**Mr CROCKETT**—And nine stayed here.

**The DEPUTY CHAIR**—How many of those 14 are still there?

**Mr CROCKETT**—All of them. Some of that nine have indicated that they are going to move in the second semester this year, and next year. I suspect that we will have very few here next year.

**The CHAIR**—Of those 23 students, do we know from where they originated? Were they Victorians initially?

**Mr CROCKETT**—Yes.

**The CHAIR**—They were all Victorians?

**Ms WILSON**—Yes. All of the cohort for the two intakes have been Victorian. One of the challenges for us operating in Victoria was our brand, because there is very high awareness of the major Victorian university brands. To come in as a college, firstly, there was limited understanding in Victoria about what a college was and, secondly, we were not an established university, and that created challenges for us as well. So our prospective student markets were asking questions at a number of levels: first was our location; second, what is a college? Third, they were comparing our course delivery and course options to those of the larger metropolitan universities, and obviously the associated facilities of those universities.

**Mr CROCKETT**—The college issue has been around for AMC for many years. We were an old college of advanced education that did not amalgamate with anyone because we were a national body and that has been one of the main drivers for our association with the University of Tasmania. So the students now get a University of Tasmania degree through the Australian Maritime College.

**The CHAIR**—So you are not taking on any more students here in Victoria and, essentially, you are closing down your operations here.

**Mr CROCKETT**—Yes. We are still getting Victorian students but they will be coming to Launceston.

**The DEPUTY CHAIR**—So those nine students that are currently here, are they going to finish here?

**Mr CROCKETT**—Yes. We have given a commitment up to 2010. We think that we will move to Tassie by the end of 2009 but we have given that undertaking and we will follow that through.

**Mr HERBERT**—So they are all studying? None dropped out?

**Mr CROCKETT**—Some dropped out, yes, for various reasons. Some failed. One dropped out because of the move but that person has enrolled in a university in Victoria.

**Ms WILSON**—Our level of attrition generally seems to be about the same level as our attrition rates within Tasmania. Certainly the level of perhaps pressure, in some ways—given that the move is a shock to students—was of some concern to us in trying to give care to these students and provide them with advice. But, overall, attrition was about the standard for Tasmania.

**Mr CROCKETT**—We came over several times to talk to students. We provided counselling. We took them to Launceston to see our operation there, so we did try to break down the difficulties that they had.

**The DEPUTY CHAIR**—The ones that dropped out because they saw that you were moving or they felt that the course would not be there, were they provided with any assistance?

**Mr CROCKETT**—As I said, there was only one, to my knowledge—and we have interviewed them all. That person chose to go to a Victorian university to do a similar course. The others that did not come to Tassie or stay here, did it for educational result purposes.

**Mr HALL**—Did you do any analysis of how important that \$5,000 relocation allowance for those

students was? Would they have done the course without it?

**Mr CROCKETT**—Well, it certainly helped. They came here because of their location. A fair percentage were from the peninsula and we decided to do that. Through the university we arranged scholarships for those that moved. If the students were living away from home, I think it was \$5,000 for that, \$5,000 for the education scholarship, and then our \$5,000, so they all got about \$15,000 a year, and they are very happy.

**Mr HALL**—Is that continuing throughout the time they take to finish their degree?

**Mr CROCKETT**—The scholarships are. The \$5,000 from AMC was based on the reimbursement of expenses for the move.

**Mr HALL**—Relocation expenses, yes.

**Mr CROCKETT**—So that was a one-off payment.

**Mr DIXON**—Do students like the videoconferencing that you use now? Is that an effective way of teaching?

**Mr CROCKETT**—Some do, some do not. The University of Tasmania in their management programs, for example, run a lecture out of Hobart that is beamed into Launceston and Burnie. Lots of universities do it, and the technology and teaching is improving significantly with that. Students that are prepared to put in do get a lot out of it.

**Mr DIXON**—Do they have somebody with them?

**Ms WILSON**—Yes.

**Mr HERBERT**—Chisholm said that they had a bit of a problem; they did not have capacity.

**Mr CROCKETT**—In the very early days, that is correct.

**Mr HERBERT**—This year?

**Mr CROCKETT**—No, 2006. We had to put in a lot of infrastructure. It cost about \$200,000 to Telstra to get the bandwidth down there for it to work. It was a disaster for the first six weeks last year.

**Mr HERBERT**—When you came down here, there was a lot of fanfare. We have heard today about the educational opportunities in each level of higher education, and, given the terms of reference of this committee, your experience is invaluable, given that you are the latest example of a university set up in an area where we were hoping to get regional delivery, everything should have been perfect, a lot of young people had a lot of hopes, and it has all gone horribly bad. What sorts of lessons would that teach the government in our quest to get more higher education delivery into regional centres? What sort of message would you give us?

**Mr CROCKETT**—This is a personal opinion. Small campuses, isolated campuses, run into a lot of financial difficulty trying to deliver education in a way that universities would like to, with all the back-up. We could not afford—nobody could—to have the student support and all those things, and that was provided for us on a service agreement level to a significant extent by Chisholm. That is one of the other reasons you are there: to share services. Also, the cost of the infrastructure and the staff and the support staff you need for a small number of students does not work. In my view, if you want to put it out in the regions, you have to have a significant cohort of students, and we were only ever going to have 120, and it is based on that that the federal government agreed to fund us very well for that, and that we not have to pay rent for those things and, through the parks, they were going to do it up. I know there was a lot of friction between the state and the federal government on that issue, but we went in on the undertakings we were given and the lie of the land was changing, and it certainly was not viable for us.

**Mr DIXON**—I am assuming, too, that it is not just the course delivery; it is the student opportunities, it is the transport, all those things.

**Mr CROCKETT**—That is right.

**Mr DIXON**—So I think we have got to go far more deeply into just what is going to happen on the site, too.

**Mr CROCKETT**—Student accommodation was going to be a big issue for us. As part of the original plans, they were going to be run and built and set up. As time went on, we could not get any firm commitments on that either.

**Ms WILSON**—Another issue for us was that we intended to get international students to the regional area as well, but we felt, due to accommodation and transportation limitations in the area, that we could not meet our obligations to the ESOS Act, so we ended up not making a formal application for international students at that campus.

**Mr CROCKETT**—Several of our academics were very well credentialled internationally and they do work all over the world. They did have some research students in that were students of American universities, and others came here for six months and worked with our people here and, as I understand it, it was very successful.

**Mr HERBERT**—Who administers the nine students here? Is it administered out of the University of Tasmania? Is it administered out of AMC, Hobart? Is it administered here? I am talking about the normal things: transactional records; I assume students would need to speak to people regularly.

**Ms WILSON**—Yes. We have full-time administrative staff and full-time academic staff.

**Mr HERBERT**—Here?

**Ms WILSON**—At Rosebud, yes.

**Mr HERBERT**—How many?

**Ms WILSON**—One full-time academic and we have three visiting academics each week. We did have two full-time administration staff and that has been reduced to one, plus a visiting staff member as well. The base of their administration is obviously handled within Tasmania—processing results, that sort of stuff—but for anything that students need face to face, there are always staff available.

**Mr CROCKETT**—Until 1 January that was done by the Australian Maritime College in Launceston. Now all our records have gone to the university student system and finance system.

**Mr HERBERT**—University of Tasmania?

**Mr CROCKETT**—Yes, University of Tasmania. We are there still as a conduit.

**The CHAIR**—Will your operation in Newnham grow, or what is the plan and the expectation?

**Mr CROCKETT**—The plan is that it will grow. But, for instance, in this particular field we have brought together the course from here, our fisheries management course from Beauty Point, and the university School of Aquaculture have joined us, so we have quite a large fisheries/marine resources area. Academic departments need to be a significant size to be successful. We are expecting growth, and we have been funded for growth by the federal government.

**The CHAIR**—Good. That might be a win down there in Tassie but it is an unfortunate situation this end.

**Mr CROCKETT**—Yes. We came here with all the right intentions, but it was never going to work for us—and this is no criticism of Chisholm—while we were there. We got a lot of flak from students, and from other clients as well. But I express again: Chisholm did a good job.

**The CHAIR**—Good. Thanks, David, and thanks, Clare, for coming along and sharing that news, because—that is right—there are those issues. In this inquiry, people are suggesting that they want universities to come out to the regions, and it is worth us recognising that there are all sorts of challenges in trying to do that.

**Mr CROCKETT**—In Victoria, with the amalgamations of the CAEs and the unis that occurred some years ago, there were a lot of satellite campuses, networks of universities. They have closed a lot of them, for a very similar reason. And we would not have come here without the financial carrots that were dangled.

**The CHAIR**—Yes.

**Mr CROCKETT**—It was just not viable.

**The CHAIR**—Thank you. There are no further items for the day. I will declare this hearing closed.

**Witnesses withdrew.**

**Committee adjourned.**